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# 무한경쟁

# INFINITE COMPETITIVE DUNGEON SOCIETY

BOOK 01

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EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

# Infinite Competitive Dungeon Society

(무한경쟁던전사회)

by

Toika

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# Synopsis

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The second moon marked the beginning of a revolutionary change.

With the emergence of monsters and dungeons in modern society, and the ability users who fights against them, the world faces a shift in its paradigm.

It heralds the advent of a new energy source and the decline of traditional occupations.

Common sense thus becomes uncommon sense, and imagination becomes reality.

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# Prologue. The Highest Paying Job

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When I was ten, my father sat me down and asked me.

“Shin, do you know who in Korea makes the most money?”

“The president.”

I was innocent.

“Wrong.”

“Mmm... Then male doctors!”

“Wrong again.”

“Male lawyers!”

“The Ministry of Gender Equality is going to take you away.”

“... Female lawyers?”

At my careful answer, my father said with a hearty laugh, “It’s the dungeon explorers.”

“... Huh?” At the age of ten, I learned about the existence of

dungeons.

# Chapter 1. Boy Becomes A Dungeon Explorer

## (1)

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My father was the direct heir of a clan known for its spearmanship. There were other ancient martial art clans scattered throughout Korea, but my father was strong even amongst the heirs. While growing up, I never once saw my father lose. Even so, my father would complain every day of his ill fortune, saying things I could not understand.

“Tsk, what use is there being strong on the outside? With no qi, it’s all looks and no substance.”

“Key? Shin has a key!”

“Haha, not key, but qi. It’s the energy you build up inside the body.”

Of course, as I was only eight years old, I didn’t understand what my father meant by building energy inside the body.

I was more interested by other things. Seeing my father smash boulders with his bare fists or drilling a hole in a concrete wall with a wooden spear in less than 10 seconds, I thought I wanted to get strong just like him.

“You can do it too.”

“Really? I can be as strong as you, Dad?”

“Of course! You just have to train hard.”

“Okay!”

I was at the age where I admired comic book superheroes. It was also why I fell for my father’s sweet talk so easily.

He had purposely left out the detail that it would take dozens of years of training. He forced me, his less than ten year old son, to scale mountains and even abandoned me in the forest. He said it was a necessary process to become a hero.

Did I obediently do what he said? When I was only eight? Of course not! At first, I was bawling my eyes out. However, the only person who could cheer me up in this situation, my mother, was in Korea. I, on the other hand, was in the middle of the Amazon Rainforest with my father. Without any way of communicating with the outside world, my cries for help went unheard.

“Uwaaaaaaah!”

“Shut up! There won’t be dinner until you kill that snake!”

“I hate you Dad! Uwaaaaah!”

My first ever summer break, which happened when I was eight,



seemed to last forever. It was the same for that year's winter break, the following summer break, and the following winter break...

For two years, I learned the basics of martial arts. At ten, I was able to at least take up a cool stance. My body was large, unlike others my age, and my once-tender arms had turned a little muscular.

Although the boys my age said that I looked cool and followed me around, the girls distanced themselves from me, saying that the cute Shin had turned into a monster.

Hmph, girls. Once they grew up, they would no doubt go crazy at the sight of muscles... Of course, back then, I was young too, and seeing my body keep changing, I whined to my father to bring my arms back. He beat me up. He had long since stopped treating me like a cute son.

And so on the my tenth birthday, my father finally brought it up.

It was a story about a 'dungeon' that would stay with me for the rest of my life.

"In the dungeon, there are lots of precious things. Mana Stones, magical weapons... heck, even orc skin would be treated as new material never-before-seen on Earth!"

"Wow! So how do you go to the dungeon?"

My father laughed as he stroked my head. “Through Dad’s cellphone.”

“Can I go too?”

“Not yet, kiddo. You’re not strong enough.”

“Dad, what’s a Mana Stone? Can I see it?”

“T-That’s...” At my inquiry, my father’s smooth talk came to a crashing halt. I should have noticed then that something was wrong.

“I-I’ll show you that later. No, there’s no reason to. You can enter the dungeon and bring one back yourself!”

“Okay! I’ll go to the dungeon! I want to see it for myself!”

My ten year old self was detached from modern technology. In this day and age where even elementary school kids had smartphones, I instead received a kid-sized wooden spear as my school entrance gift. There was no way I could have known what dungeons really were.

Some kids my age were already playing dungeon exploring fantasy games on their smartphones!

Without knowing that dungeons were imaginary, I bragged to my friends that I would enter a dungeon when I grew up. When my friends understood the severity of my delusion, they showed me all kinds of novels and games to convince me that dungeons did not exist in the real world. Unfortunately, my two years of training had turned even my brain into muscle.

In other words, I was slow to understand what people were saying.

At school, I talked and talked about become a dungeon explorer. What do you think happened? In what was dubbed “Kang Shin’s Dungeon Explorer Incident,” I lost my two of my best friends, MinSoo and SooChan.

Kang Shin was my name, of course. Kang was my family name and Shin was my given name. My father chose my name, saying that single syllable names seemed strong. My mother had also agreed that it was a good name.

Regardless of how others reacted, my grand ambition of becoming a dungeon explorer never disappeared. I trained harder and harder. Having trained systematically under my father, who had already half-transcended the limits of a human, when I became fifteen-years-old, my father was the only person left on Earth who I was afraid of.

Guns were scary, to be honest, but I was able to dodge it with about a fifty percent chance. It was then that I realized that I had surpassed the realm of a human being. The next thing I knew, I had no one to call friends, and even my own beautiful younger

sister was avoiding me.

On my fifteenth birthday, I took my clothes off and stood in front of a mirror. Because I couldn't see my whole body if I stood too close, I had to stand far back.

In it was a Hulk.

“Nooooo, this can't be...!”

Well, maybe I was exaggerating a little. In any case, my body was far from normal. I was 2 meters tall and was only in my third year of middle school. My body looked like a gorilla's. It was all muscle and barely any fat. It was at the stage where my limbs were better described as deadly weapons. It was not something the human body could have.

Something was definitely wrong. Not even my father looked like this.

“It's almost like an orc. Your handsome face takes after me, but your body...”

“Dear husband, you must mean his face takes after me. His body is just like yours.”

My mother treated only my head as her son. Even though she was my true mother, I sometimes suspected her of being a protractor. How else could she be so sharp and ruthless in her measurements

of me?

“Father, why did I become so big?”

“I don’t know, maybe it’s because you started training at a young age.”

“When did you start your training?”

“Sixteen, I think.”

“You crook!”

“Hey, I only wanted to make you a dungeon explorer!”

On my fifteenth birthday, I beat my father in an official match. It was the moment where youth beat out experience. But even after taking a loss at the hands of my shoulder throw, my father said with bitterness, “So you didn’t manage to obtain qi...”

“There is no such thing as qi! The thing about dungeons is a lie too!”

“A lie... You’ll find out soon, son, so spare my back.”

On the same night that I carried out my sweet revenge, I received a message on the smartphone my mother bought me for winning

against father. When I saw it, my eyes opened wide.

– Unlock by entering in your password.

“Ku... I can’t open it...”

Because my head was full of muscle, it was impossible for me to remember the basic password mother put in.

The next day, I asked mother to unlock the phone. Lost for words, she got rid of the lock entirely. I don’t understand why she didn’t do so in the first place. I nodded my head as I accepted the phone. When I looked down, this was the message I received.

[You have been acknowledged by the self-proclaimed Strongest on Earth ‘Kang YungOong,’ and have acquired the Dungeon Explorer’s License. As of this moment, you have become one of the five dungeon explorers on Earth. Would you like to enter the dungeon now?]

Dungeon explorer it said! My eyes became wide in surprise as I realized the dream I had since I was ten years old was coming true. Watching my surprised face, mother walked toward me, looked at the phone screen, and crossed her arms.

“This old man dares to mess with his son with KaTalk? Today, he won’t go unpunished.”

“What’s KaTalk, Mom?”

“It’s the messenger you’re looking at now.”

“What’s a messenger?”

“...”

I became embarrassed when she didn’t reply, so I went to my younger sister to ask. She had just graduated elementary school and was in her first year of middle school. When I knocked on her door, she ran towards it happily and opened it. After seeing my appearance, she let out a shriek and shrunk in fear. When I explained my situation, she kindly explained it to me with a shy smile. I looked scary on the outside, but she still cared for me deeply.

After about five hours of explanation, I became a bit more used to modern technology.

“Yua, how do I reply to this?”

“Ah, mm, oppa, like this...”

Ah, what a cute angel! Seeing my sister trying to help even as she stuttered made me want to hug her. But because I didn’t want to scare her again, I held myself back.



After learning how to reply to the KaTalk I received, I told her I would pay her back with a Mana Stone from the dungeon. Then, I typed 'Yes' into my phone.

The next moment, I was inside the dungeon. An endless grey hallway, walls made out of stones and torches hanging on them. It was exactly like what father had described. Perhaps he wasn't lying after all.

There was more. The moment I realized where I was, I heard someone's whisper in my ears.

[Kang Shin, Bronze Rank 9 Dungeon Explorer, has entered the dungeon.]

[This is your first time. Beginner Dungeon Explorer Support has sent you 5 Lowest-grade Potions.]

[Analyzing your abilities... complete. Beginner Dungeon Explorer Support has sent you a Sharp Wooden Spear.]

[Confirming rank... complete. You are 5th of the 5 Dungeon Explorers from Earth. You are 146,298th of the 146,298 total dungeon explorers. Rankings will be renewed at 6 A.M. tomorrow morning.]

[You have obtained a Status. Would you like to confirm?

Yes/No]

Sorry for dragging it out so long. Everything was leading up to this moment.

The moment where I became a true dungeon explorer.

... The dungeon explorer, titled ‘Crown Prince of 5F.’

## Chapter 2. Boy Becomes A Dungeon Explorer (2)

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I couldn't calm myself hearing all these alerts. The first thing I thought of was 'Yes! I'm finally a dungeon explorer!' The next thing was 'is Bronze Rank 9 high or low?' The last was 'what's a Potion?'

Anything more was hard to put into my head.

“Ugh, I'm getting dizzy. Can you say that slower?”

[Would you like to check your message log?]

“What's a message log?”

[It contains the messages Kang Shin-nim received.]

“Yes, show me!”

As soon as the words left my mouth, a translucent window appeared in front of my eyes. Startled, I took a step back. To think it could trick and appear before me, who has better senses than my father... But when I realized that it did not have a real form, I let my guard down and approached it. There, the voices I had been

hearing were recorded. It was amazing.

“Sharp Wooden Spear?”

[It is inside your inventory. Would you like to confirm?]

“Confirm how?”

[You just have to say the word inventory.]

“Inventory...? Uwoah!”

It was the same as before. A translucent window suddenly appeared before my eyes. The only difference was that this one did not have words on it, and that it was long in height and short in width. There were 10 fist-sized spaces next to each other. There was nothing above or below them, so it was 1×10. And on the first space was picture of a glass bottle filled with red liquid. The number 5 was written next to it. It seemed this was the potion the voice was talking about. In the second space was a wooden spear. When I reached toward it subconsciously, my hand went into the window.

“Uwoah!”

What was more surprising was that my hand didn't come out the other side. It really felt like my hand was 'inside' the window. I wriggled my hand in surprise, but I stopped when I felt something touching my hand. It was thick and long. This was... a spear! I instinctively grabbed onto it and pulled it out of the window. As expected, a sharp-looking wooden spear was in my hand. As I stared at it, a small window popped up in front of me.

[Sharp Wooden Spear (Normal)

Durability – 70/70

Attack – 10

Equipment Limit – None

Explanation – A wooden spear perfect for a beginner to use. It has no special abilities.]

“Mm.”

I will be honest. I had no clue what this meant. For me who had never played a single game before, the terms 'beginner's weapon' and 'basic weapons' were foreign. In any case, I knew it was a weapon I could use. That was enough.

I hung the wooden spear on my back and proceeded to check out

this thing called potion. It said it would restore 100 HP, but I didn't know what that meant. Then, the voice told me to check my status. I didn't know whose voice this was, but I thought of it as a nice noona's, and just like she told me, I yelled out 'check status.'

[Name: Kang Shin Race: Human Sex: Male

Class: None Title: None Rank: Bronze 9

Level: 1

HP – 240/240 MP – 0

Strength – 18 Dexterity – 16 Constitution – 17

Intelligence – 5 Magic – 0 Charm – 7 Luck – 10

Skill – Low-rank Martial Arts (Lv 4), Low-rank Spear Technique (Master), Mid-rank Spear Technique (Lv 3)]

Strange. I see two zeros there. And if my strength is 18 but my intelligence is 5, is my strength high or is my intelligence low?

“What's HP and what's MP?”

[HP represents your life. When you get attacked by monsters, your HP will decrease. When it reaches 0, you will be kicked out of the dungeon. In that case, you will not be able to re-enter the dungeon for one week.]

[MP represents your mana. It is used to cast magic or skills. It is also called Qi.]

“Qi!”

[Your MP is 0. In other words, you have no Qi.]

“How can I get it?”

[Those from worlds other than Earth know methods to accumulate mana in their bodies. Also, those who already have mana can increase the amount of mana they have by clearing the dungeon floor and leveling up.]

“Leveling up?”

[It will be explained to you soon. In conclusion, there is currently no way for Kang Shin-nim to obtain MP.]



“What can I do to get it?”

[You need to obtain a mana cultivation method.]

“How can I obtain that?”

[You can buy it at the Floor Shop located at the end of dungeon floors. Note, it can only be bought from Floor Shops above 10F, and they are very expensive.]

“10F! Since I’m on 1st floor, I just have to climb to 10th, right?”

[That is right.]

“How much does it cost? ...is it more than 50,000 won?”

I was in my 3rd year of middle school, and with my monthly allowance being 10,000 won, 50,000 won was an enormous amount of money. As I was wondering, the voice answered me.

[You cannot buy Floor Shop items with the won currency.]

You may only trade gold or monster remains dropped by the dungeon's monsters.]

“Gold!”

Okay, there was hope! From what I understood, there were monsters in the dungeon and they dropped gold when defeated. I could climb to a higher floor when I defeated all of them, and when I reached the end of the 10th floor, I could buy a mana cultivation method from something called the Floor Shop. Then, I can finally obtain Qi! I can fulfill my father's dream as well!

I was awed at my brain's ability to comprehend all this.

Of course, my brain wasn't yet capable of thinking 'if it was so easy, my father would have done it already.' My intelligence was 5, and it was only a year later that I learned the average level 1 stat was 10. I even forgot why I wanted to become a dungeon explorer, and set my eyes on obtaining Qi.

I signaled noona that I wanted to begin exploring by asking her where monsters lived. Noona kindly told me I could begin by shouting 'Commence Exploration.' I shouted as soon as I heard it.

“Commence Exploration!”

Then, all the windows that had been surrounding me disappeared in an instant and an ominous aura began to surround

me. A few of the torches were extinguished and only the ones closest to me remained lit, burning strongly. Because I traveled the world with my father every break, darkness could not faze me. However, the prickling sensation I felt on my skin was concerning. Then, I felt a presence I did not feel before.

I held my wooden spear and put up my guard. This presence was like that of the 10m long anaconda I fought at the Amazon...!

Sss, sss. I could sense the anacondas crawling towards me from all sides, and I gulped. I knew I couldn't defeat an anaconda with my strength alone. Previously, father and I had barely defeated it with me drawing its attention and my father delivering blow after blow. But could I defeat several of them? Alone? I didn't want to be kicked out when I finally became a dungeon explorer!

Thinking this, I tightly gripped my wooden spear. I saw them walk out of the darkness, and my eyes opened wide in surprise.

“Uwaaa...aah?

50cm long and 30cm wide. What seemed like puddings seemed to be diligently crawling towards me. To compare these things to anacondas... I felt sorry to the anacondas. I doubted whether these things were even alive. I stabbed my spear through one to check and it easily pierced through.

[You obtained a Slime Piece.]

[You obtained 1 gold.]

It exploded with a bang. I stood still, stupefied, but soon gave a shout of joy and jumped.

“Whoo! I’m a dungeon explorer now!”

The curtains had lifted for the legendary stage of the dungeon explorer Kang Shin!

... Or so I thought before I knew any better. It didn’t take long until harsh reality set in.

When I first felt it was when I reached the 3rd floor, past the 2nd floor when honey bees attacked. Compared to the 1st and 2nd floor, which were relatively easy, monsters called goblins appeared on the 3rd floor, giving me trouble.

At first, I did not even know what happened as my HP reached 0 and I was chased out. I couldn’t re-enter the dungeon for a week. The next week, I grit my teeth and entered the dungeon. Then, I finally figured out how I had died. Poisonous darts. The goblins had shot out poisonous darts and I had been completely paralyzed.

When monsters hit me, it usually hurt as much as when my father hit me. But because of the paralyzing poison, I couldn’t feel any pain whatsoever. Not feeling pain was scarier than one might think. Because there were so many of them, it was hard to dodge

every single poisonous dart. As a result, my HP reached 0 multiple times and I couldn't enter the dungeon for a whole month. In the end, I asked my father for advice.

“Father, the goblins keep shooting poisonous darts at me.”

“Hm? You're already at the 3rd floor? It hasn't even been three months yet.”

“Am I fast?”

“It took your father a whole year to reach the 2nd floor.”

It turned out my father had not yet awoken his sixth sense and was unable to feel the slimes approaching. As a result, it had taken him a year to take the initiative. Since you couldn't enter the dungeon for a week once you were kicked out, it wasn't surprising it had taken so long. Even I made no progress for a month.

“So you're level 3 now?”

“Yep.”

When you cleared the dungeon floor, your level increased by 1 and you were given 5 bonus stats. With it, you could raise your strength, dexterity, constitution, intelligence, and others. Because I was unhappy with my intelligence being at 5, I put all my stats into intelligence when I reached level 2. Thanks to that, my intelligence had reached the level of an average person.

Of course, even with my increased intelligence, because of the long years I lived out of touch with reality, I still believed I could easily reach the 10th floor. I tried to raise my magic stat when I reached level 3, but I couldn't put any points into a stat that was 0. In the end, I put 2 into strength, 2 into dexterity, and 1 into constitution.

“You must have made some money then.”

“Money?”

I tilted my head. Money? I had gold, but no money. What relation was there between the dungeon's gold and money? What my father said next made my ears perk up.

# Chapter 3. Boy Becomes A Dungeon Explorer

## (3)

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“You can exchange it at the Floor Shop.”

“Exchange? You mean you can exchange gold for won? Is there a bank?”

“At the Floor Shop, stupid.”

Even if my intelligence stat was 10, I had lived too long as a fool. Even though I increased my intelligence stat, it was still difficult to breach the level I was born with.

I talked back to my father, not fully understanding what he meant by going to the Floor Shop. In the end, I had to pay with my body. It was true that the body suffered if the mind was stupid.

A week later, when I could re-enter the dungeon, I did not shout ‘commence exploration,’ but rather turned back and went to the 2nd Floor Shop.

Because I was told what I wanted was at the 10th Floor Shop, I had not visited the 1st and 2nd Floor Shops. It was because I felt I would waste my gold if I saw what was on display.

“Yes, customer, you can exchange 2,400 won for 1 gold.”



“2,400 won!?”

“Yes, customer. The exchange rate changes at 6 A.M. every morning, so I suggest you exchange it now when the rate is high.”

I gasped in front of the Floor Shop owner, who was a pretty noona.

2,400 won!

The first floor's slimes usually dropped 1 gold for every three killed and the 2nd floor's honey bees dropped 2 gold at the same rate. Although I had not killed many goblins, they dropped 4 to 5 gold.

This number was likely to increase exponentially as I went higher into the dungeon. Currently, I possessed 655 gold. Although my mental math wasn't perfect, I knew I would have well more than 1,000,000 won if I exchanged all that I had.

1,000,000 won! It was an unimaginable amount for the fifteen-year-old me. Even a single [Sin Saimdang](#) would make me tremble, but 1,000,000 won meant twenty Sin Saimdangs!

Sin Saimdang is the woman on the Korean 50,000 won bill.

I was certain 1,000,000 won would be a large amount for any fifteen year old. It was then that I realized what my father meant by dungeon explorer being the highest-paying job.

“Wow.”

I stood in awe. Soon, I opened my mouth to ask the shop noona to exchange all the gold I had. Suddenly, I remembered. To obtain Qi, I had to buy a mana cultivation method. To do that, I had to go to the 10th Floor Shop, and I had to buy it... with gold.

“Ah.”

My shoulders dropped. Then, the shop noona looked at me with worrying eyes. “What’s wrong, customer?”

“N-No, it’s nothing. Thank you.”

Although I was conflicted, I swallowed my tears and turned back. Qi! I gave up 1,000,000 won for this thing called qi! However, I remembered my father always talking about the importance of having qi. Thus, I chose to prioritize qi rather than 1,000,000 won.

Once I obtained qi, I vowed to exchange all the gold I had and eat all the delicious things in the world! With that, I jumped into the 3rd floor.

Of course, I became paralyzed by the goblins’ darts and was beaten to death again.

“What am I supposed to do, father!? I got kicked out because of you!”

“For my son, you really are stupid. You could have just left the dungeon.”

“Kuk, why didn’t you tell me earlier?”

“Haa. When you level up, increase your intelligence stat first, got it? I’ll tell you how to deal with the poisonous darts first...”

What my father said was simple. I just had to buy and consume the paralyses recovery potion from the 2nd Floor Shop. With just one, I would become immune to paralysis for a whole hour. Why didn’t I buy it when I went there before!? I regretted not checking what was being sold.

That day, I made two vows. One was that I would visit the Floor Shop every time I cleared a floor and check what was being sold. The second was that I would increase my intelligence stat when I leveled up.

As a result, I was able to safely reach the 5th floor. It had only taken me half a year.

“Chwiik! Human!”

“Human, bigger than us!”

What appeared on the 5th floor were pig-headed humans

speaking human language. According to the message noona that spoke to me from time to time, they were monsters called orcs. Although I felt a sense of closeness to them because of our similarity in size, I was annoyed by their tendency to treat me as food and attack.

However, I was at a disadvantage when I faced them directly. I had put 15 points into intelligence, and my intelligence was now at 20. Although I had gotten smarter, my other stats were low. Because I did not yet know any other method of raising my status points, I was forced to fight the orcs when my overall spec was below them.

“Chwiik! Human, weak! Weak!”

“Who’s weak!? Agh, I shouldn’t have put everything into intelligence. Agh!”

I could finally think of it once my intelligence had reached 20. Of course, I was forced out, unable to defeat any of them.

At this time, I began to learn with my smarter brain and I could finally communicate with others my age. I had stopped talking about dungeons at school after the ‘Kang Shin’s Dungeon Explorer Incident,’ and after my intelligence reached 20, I came to understand that it wasn’t normal that I could enter dungeons. I also learned it was abnormal to have family spear techniques to learn.

Realizing that I might end up a loner for the rest of my life, I

started to furiously study common sense, and after the 10th time I was kicked out of the 5th floor, I was able to act like a normal human being. There wasn't much I could do about my huge frame, but I had finally managed to make some friends.

It was also the first time I learned of the existence of online RPG games.

“Uh....”

“What's wrong, Shin?”

“No, this dun...”

The word dungeon almost came out my mouth before I swallowed it back down. The RPG game character's 'status' was too similar to the status I had. That said, I couldn't show my status to my friends. I could open my inventory and bring out my wooden spear, but I didn't, as I was afraid the government would come to take me away.

However, I was now certain. Although the interface was different, there were many things in common, like the inventory, status, and monsters. Thus, I began to learn games with the hope that it would help me in my future dungeon exploration.

Unlike in RPGs, I couldn't gain experience and level up no matter how many monsters I killed. All I could get from them were their body parts, gold, skill experience, and the extremely rare

equipment. From this, I found my answer.

If my stats were too low, I had to make do with skills. My attack power got stronger with increased skill levels. It was what I learned from playing games.

“Uraaaaaaaah!”

“Chwiik, mere human!”

“Mere orc!”

I quarreled with the orcs as I stabbed them with my spear. When I told my father about it, he treated me like a weirdo.

The mid-rank spear technique that had started out at level 3 had slowly grown as I fought the orcs on the 5th floor. Half a year after I entered the 5th floor, when I had entered my first year of high school, I had finally reached level 10, the master level.

[You have mastered the Mid-rank Spear Technique! You can strike even more fiercely and sharply with your spear. You can intimidate others whose skill level is lower than yours.]

[You must possess mana to learn High-rank Spear Technique. You cannot learn the High-rank Spear Technique.]

Here, mana once again held me down. However, I did not give up. I knew I could gain mana once I reached the 10th floor.

In truth, I had already realized it. My father was unable to gain mana even after 20 years of being a dungeon explorer. Not long after my intelligence increased, I finally understood what it suggested. However, I did my best to ignore it. I didn't want to accept the fact that I... could not obtain mana. Afraid of knowing the truth, I didn't ask my father.

The 5th floor was different than the other floors. Unlike the 1st through 4th floor where my level had gone up automatically once I reached the end of the hallway, there was a large door at the end of the 5th floor hallway. When I stood in front of it, the calm voice once again entered my ears.

[The Floor Master, Orc Lord, is beyond this door. Would you like to enter alone? Or would you like to request a party with players from other dimensions?]

What was beyond the door was undoubtedly the 'boss monster.' As this was the first time I had faced it, I was extremely excited. I didn't know what the voice meant by other dimensions, but I found requesting for help without even giving it a try to not be in the spirit of a man's pride. As such, I slammed the door open.

"Orc Lord! Fight me!"



“ ... ”

“... Chwiik.”

Inside the room were about fifteen orcs, all of whom were glaring at me. Deeper inside was a larger pig-human sitting on a large chair and biting down on a piece of meat. He raised his head and I realized just how big he was.

He was wearing a thick steel armor and had a glaive leaning next to him. Without mistake, he was the Orc Lord. I let out a light smile.

“Oh, I came to the wrong place.”

Although I quickly stepped back, the door had closed behind me automatically. The orcs slowly got up one by one as they picked up their weapons.

‘Fudge, those things hurt like hell,’ I whispered as I dropped my head.

It had been a while since I was kicked out.

I was beaten to oblivion.

## Chapter 4. Boy Becomes A Dungeon Explorer (4)

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I had no pride to save, nor did I need to. The next week, I stood in front of the same door and obediently shouted that I would enter a party. Then, a translucent window appeared.

[This is the party recruitment board. Click on the one you want and enter a party.]

“Let’s see. Hunting the Orc Lord, looking for healer. Must be above level 5. How stupid, isn’t everyone on the 5th floor level 5?”

Thinking that there were people even more stupid than me, I slowly scrolled through the window and found one that was looking for a front-line damage dealer. Because I started playing games, I knew what a front-line damage dealer was. They were people who attacked in melee range using close-range weapons.

The moment I clicked on that post, I felt stunned briefly and soon found myself among nine other people.

“Welcome. You’re a front-line damage dealer, right?”

A handsome western-style man began talking to me. Thinking it was English, I was about to yell out ‘I cannot speak English.’ Fortunately, I found that I could understand what he was saying

without problem.

“Y-Yes, I use a spear.”

“Oh, a spearman! Are you from the Edias continent?”

“N-No, I’m from Seoul.”

“Seoul? It’s the first time I’ve heard of it. Anyone else?”

“It’s not from the Luka continent.”

“It’s not from Pilos either.”

The people around me murmured as they shook their heads. When I glanced at them, I noticed that most of them had white or dark skin, and had blonde, red, or brown hair. They were all foreigners! As I cowered slightly, the man who first talked to me approached. He was wearing a small shield on his arm and had a short sword attached to it. With a sigh, he reached his hand out to me.

“You must be from a minor place. Nice to meet you. I’m the party leader Ellos Von Kasina. Paul, Celtine, and I are from the Edias continent.”

“[Gasina](#)?”

Gasina means b\*tch in Korean.

“It’s Kasina.”

I grabbed the hand of the party leader, who looked slightly disappointed. Having played games for a while, I knew what a party was. It was just that I never thought I would be in a party with people from other worlds...

“I’m Kang Shin. Nice to meet you.”

After a brief introduction with the other party members, I thought we would immediately fight the Orc Lord. I was mistaken.

“Hold on.”

It was a small girl from a place called the Luka continent. Besides this small girl, three other members, a woman carrying a rapier, a long-eared beauty with a quiver on her back, and a weak framed girl barely holding onto her wooden shield came from this continent. The small girl was a blonde, twin-tailed beauty, whose hair shone like gold and whose wooden staff matched well. However, the way she talked wasn’t cute in the slightest.

“Wait, look at his clothes. Aren’t those the beginner’s clothes?”

“Beginner’s clothes?”

What was wrong with my clothes? I looked down at the clothes I

was wearing. Because I wanted to be in clothes suited for moving around, I always came into the dungeon wearing my training clothes. Even if they were ripped, they were restored once I got out of the dungeon.

“... You haven’t gone to the Floor Shop?”

“I did.”

Because the other side was talking informally, I did the same. The girl asked again, surprised. “They sell defensive equipment there. Why didn’t you buy them?”

“Ah.”

I did remember the Floor Shop selling defensive equipment. However, my goal was to reach the 10th floor and buy a mana cultivation method. I couldn’t thoughtlessly spend gold before then. It was the same for my weapon. I continued to use the Sharp Wooden Spear given to me at the beginning. Of course, it wasn’t so sharp anymore.

“I have to save money to buy a mana cultivation method.”

“What? You don’t have a mana cultivation method? What family are you from?”

“Family? The Kang family I guess?”

“Doesn’t that family have a mana cultivation method?”

“Nope.”

“What? Oh no, we got the wrong party member. Kick him out!”

“Mm, it’s going to be difficult if you don’t have a mana cultivation method.”

“He doesn’t have a mana cultivation method?”

The other party members began to whisper to each other. Realizing that something was going wrong, I talked to Ellos, who seemed to be the most understanding.

“Does everyone else have a mana cultivation method?”

“Of course. Wait, I don’t know about the other dungeons, but it’s known to be impossible to climb to the 5th floor of the First Dungeon without a mana cultivation method. How did you get this far?”

“Oh, I raised my skill level. I mastered my mid-rank spear technique...”

“Mid-rank master!?” This time, another person in the back yelled out in surprise. It was a brown-haired man carrying a large shield

and wearing a thick leather armor.

“Don’t lie. I practiced my shield technique for 10 years and it’s only just gotten to mid-rank level 2. You said you mastered the mid-rank spear technique!?”

“I did... is that weird?”

“It is! Mastering a mid-rank weapon skill without even a mana cultivation method, I don’t believe it! Don’t tell me, you have high-rank spear technique?”

“No, it said I couldn’t learn it because I don’t have mana.”

“...”

All the party members fell silent. Then, Ellos spoke out. “Let’s bring him in.”

“But Ellos...”

“We barely climbed to the 5th floor with the three of us. With the rule, [all players below the 10th floor can only be partied with people from their own continent], he must have climbed to the 5th floor on his own. If he had his own party, he wouldn’t need to enter ours. Am I right?”

“Yes.”

When I nodded, Ellos seemed to gain more confidence and talked louder.

“See. Kang Shin alone has the ability of all three of us combined. I can’t speak for the future, but at least on this 5th floor, he has more than enough qualification to fulfill the damage dealer role. He’s a mid-rank spear technique master!”

“But look at his armor...”

“I don’t like him...”

“Kick him!”

The twin-tail kept on saying to kick me. I held myself back from glaring at her, but she got more arrogant and glared at me.

“Kick him!”

“Miss Palludia, please calm down. We haven’t seen his skills yet.”

“We don’t need to! Look at him, he’s using a half-broken wooden spear!”

“Hmm...”



“It’ll be too late if we take the time to see it. I don’t know how your continent is, but mine is in a fierce war against the demon race. If I lose the opportunity to get stronger for a whole week, we’ll fall behind in the war!”

“My continent is also at war with invaders. Hu, fine. Just give us some time. Mister Kang Shin, I apologize, but you’ll need to show us your power. There should be an orc further back, so show us your abilities by defeating it.”

“Sure, it’s not a hard request.”

“Kuk...”

The brat named Palludia stepped back from the negotiation with Ellos, but still bit down on her lips in displeasure.

“You’re an orc yourself...”

“I’m not an orc!”

I couldn’t help but yell out when she picked on my weak spot. When I faced her and glared, she seemed to be intimidated as she turned away.

“Hmph!”

“Hmph.”

I also snorted. Then I sauntered off. Because there were no orcs near the door, I had to walk for 5 minutes.

“Chwiik, human!”

Found one. It was wearing a worn-down leather armor and carrying a fearsome glaive. Confirming that the others were watching, I ran toward it. My spear spun in my hand, and I soon snapped my hand, grabbing onto it tightly. Now!

“Haap!”

I lightly dodged the orc’s glaive attack, and the spear I struck out like lightning pierced its target. The orc that was running toward me stopped in its track, let out a burping sound, and began to fall with blood foaming at its mouth. As he fell, I quickly pulled back my spear to prevent it from breaking. Without anything to lean on, the orc fell with a thud.

At first, I fought with monsters with brute strength, blocking their attacks with the spear. But because the durability of my spear wore off and fell below 10, these days I was doing my best to kill the orcs in a single blow. Because of my mastery of the mid-rank spear technique, it wasn’t too difficult to do.

“W-With just one hit...!”

“No way, did you see that? I didn’t even feel a hint of mana!”

“I did! Mana aside, that’s not even a skill!”

“Amazing...”

Ellos and the other party members seemed to be awed by my technique. Hm, I guess these days, I’m evenly matched with father just with pure spearmanship. Unfortunately, there was always that one person who likes to rain on your parade.

“Hmph, that was just a coincidence! If he tried again, there’s no way he can draw such a clean and beautiful trajectory!”

“M-Miss Palludia, even if it was a coincidence, he is undoubtedly skilled. He is more than suited to become our party member.”

“Eeek, if you can’t agree with me, I’ll just leave! It’s either my party or him! Your choice!”

“T-That’s...”

“Then I’ll just defeat another one.”

Because Ellos looked troubled, I spoke out. Ellos looked at me with teary eyes. Disgusting. Palludia, on the other hand, snorted and said, “Try it!”

“How convenient, there’s one right there.”

An orc archer. They were an annoying bunch that shot arrows from afar. Thankfully, they didn't appear often. When they appeared with other orcs, I had to be prepared to receive injuries as I charged in. But now, there was only one orc archer. For me who could avoid even bullets, avoiding arrows wasn't much of a problem.

“Chwiik! Orc shoot arrow!”

“Human stab orc!”

Having hunted alone for a year, it became my hobby of sorts to talk back to monsters like them.

With ease, I tilted my head and dodged the orc archer's arrow. I took a step forward and shot towards the orc archer. Just like before, my spear beautifully pierced through orc archer's neck.

“How is it?”

“Ee... Eeeek....”

Although Palludia's eyes were glaring, she clenched her fists and looked down. She had accepted her loss. I didn't know just what part of me she didn't like, but I could think of quite a few by myself. As such, I decided to not care.

What was important was not the outside, but the inside! I am Kang Shin, the son of the world's strongest spearman. I'll show you the strength I gained by giving up my ordinary life!

# Chapter 5. Boy Becomes A Dungeon Explorer

## (5)

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I felt much better knowing that I forced her off her high horse. Ellos seemed to be at a loss as the comrades from Palludia's continent came to console her, but he soon clapped his hands and livened up the mood.

"Then I'll take it that no one has any problems with Mister Kang Shin joining the party. Once Mister Kang Shin is rested from his fight with the orcs, we will go right away."

"Roger."

"Got it."

"Take good care of me, mate."

"Take good care of me too."

I greeted the other party members, then glanced at Palludia. My eyes met hers when she had briefly raised her head, but because she glared at me so intently, I hurriedly looked away. Because I had no contact with girls other than my sister and my mother, I felt awkward making eye contact with girls for more than 2 seconds.

"Then we'll enter."

“Haa, I hope we succeed this time.”

“Not being able to come back here for a week... it’s too cruel.”

As the party members murmured and prepared themselves, Ellos slowly pushed open the door. A familiar sight filled my eyes. There were fourteen orcs and the Orc Lord was at the deepest part, biting off on a piece of meat.

You bastard, you’re going to become a pig at this rate. Ah, you already are.

“Commence battle! We’re going to kill the other orcs first! Paul, hold off the Orc Lord!”

“Roger!”

“Miss Palludia, focus your healing on Paul! Miss Esis, support Paul! Everyone else, we’re going after the orcs one by one, starting from the left!”

I ran out. Although the orcs attacked me, unlike last week, I had comrades. In this party, we had two archers. One aimed at the Orc Lord and the other aimed at the orcs attacking me. I made use of the time he earned me, shooting out with my spear and quickly killing an orc.

“Next!”

“Wow, you’re doing great, mate!”

“Haaaap!”

“Guoooooo!”

As the party members and I fiercely fought off the attacking orcs, the Orc Lord’s cry resounded throughout the room. To even consider fighting against him alone... how foolish I was.

I could hear Paul, the warrior who was fighting the Orc Lord, letting out several grunts.

“My HP is going down fast! Miss Palludia!”

“I know! Healing!”

No way, that healing is THE healing from games? I was just about to turn and see with my own eyes when I realized it might trouble other people. I turned back to the orc I was facing. Like hell I’d leave myself open for attack!

“Hap!”

“Another one-hit kill. I’ve never seen anything like it!”



“You can do it too!”

“I can’t. Ah, here comes another one!”

“Haaaaap!”

“Kuhahahaha! Orcs, RISE!”

[Orc Lord used ‘Warcry’! All orcs have been cleared of any negative status effects! All orcs temporarily become super-armored. Their attack power increases by 50%!]

“Bullshit! A mere orc is able to use Warcry?”

A female swordsman who was swinging her sword next to me yelled out and cursed. She was one of the women from Palludia’s Luka continent. She was using a rapier and had an elegant appearance. Realizing that you really can’t judge a book by its cover, I silently attacked with my spear.

I didn’t know what a super-armor was, but I could still kill orcs with a single blow. When I diligently killed my sixth orc, I suddenly heard Ellos’ shout.

“Paul!”

“Cough! I’ll go on ahead, see you at the palace.”

[Party member Paul Von Cravis has died.]

Seeing the message use an ominous word like death, I complained to the message noona. As this was the first time I was doing a party play, it was something I did not want to experience. It seemed Ellos was more shocked than me, which made sense considering they seemed to from the same continent and had even climbed to the 5th floor together.

“Kuk, super-armor it says. Damn it... I’ll tank! Miss Shuna, help me! It’ll be difficult with just me alone!”

“G-Got it!”

A delicate girl, who was using her wooden shield to barely block the orcs’ attacks, answered with a weak voice. Then, as she ran towards Ellos, she tripped on a dead orc’s glaive and fell.

“Ow! Hueee...”

“Miss Shuna!”

“Hueee!”

How did a girl like her end up with a shield...? As I pierced my spear through the eighth orc, I made an expression of disbelief as I looked at Shuna running to Ellos while crying. As if she had read my expression, the rapier-using woman looked at me and said with a bitter smile.

“Shuna is a princess of a small kingdom. According to her, everyone in her lineage is blessed by their guardian god to have an abnormally strong constitution. But because she had no talent with any weapons, she was left with no other choice than to wield a shield.”

“Wow, a blessing?”

It really was like a fantasy world. Well, I guess my life wasn't that different.

“Don't look away!”

“Ah, sorry!”

There was only one orc left other than the Orc Lord. Because of this super-armor, it seemed unfazed by incoming attacks as it charged forward. As such, another party member got kicked out. It was Palludia's job to heal him, but she was preoccupied with healing Ellos and Shuna.

“Kuaaaa! Die!”

“Kuk! Miss Palludia!”

“Hiing, Ludiaaaa!”

“I’m doing my best! Healing!”

“We should take care of him quickly and go help!”

“Kuk, this coming from someone who killed more than half the orcs... it sounds like a taunt...”

I defeated the last orc with the other party members. Now, only the Orc Lord was left. However, the situation didn’t call for any peace of mind. Unsurprisingly, Shuna had been unable to handle the Orc Lord’s attacks and was kicked out.

“Shunaaa!”

“Kuaaaaa!”

When Shuna’s body turned to small particles and scattered, Palludia’s eyes rolled back and she charged toward the Orc Lord as she swung her staff. She almost looked like Jeanne d’Arc. In other words, it seemed like she would be whisked away with fire.

“T-This mad princess!”

“No, why is our healer charging forward!?”

Now, I was beginning to understand how similar this dungeon was with a game. I knew fully well what would happen if our healer got kicked out. As such, I charged toward the crazy girl. Thankfully, it seemed like the super-armor had ended as Ellos managed to hold off the Orc Lord’s attacks. Even so, Palludia would be in danger if she entered the Orc Lord’s attack range.

“You pig!!!!”

“Kuoooo!”

Palludia charged forward swinging her staff. The Orc Lord seemed to respond, as it raised its fists up.

‘Damn it, I’m going to be late!’

I ran forward as fast as I could.

“Diiiiieee!”

“Kuooo!”

“You crazy...!”

Right before the Orc Lord’s fist fell on Palludia, I managed to

reach her. I quickly pushed her to the side, and as I saw the Orc Lord's fist about to pour down on me, I could only think of one thing. 'Gee, that's one big fist.'

Kwang!

I died.

Of course, I couldn't re-enter the dungeon for a week.

The week where I couldn't enter the dungeon always went by in a breeze. Sweating blood as I traded blows, sword against spear with monsters, was vastly different than spending my days going to school and talking with friends.

If being a dungeon explorer was casting forth my life, then my school life was like dreaming of peace and happiness.

Dreams were nice. They were happy, were not painful, and were fun. But it wasn't fun when it continued for a whole week. There was no meaning to such a life. It felt suffocating and irritating. For me who was used to living the intense life of fighting monsters, a life of no danger and pain was... terrifying.

Although my father now entered the dungeon to earn money as the head of a household, his initial goal must have been different. Just like me, it must have been with an excited mind that he charged into the dungeon to show off his strength.

I had devoted my entire life to my spear technique. It was powerful enough to send any slime, honey bee, goblin, or orc flying. It was a sense of pleasure hard to describe with words. It was almost like... a drug.

“I wonder if they succeeded.”

A week later, I once again stood in front of the boss room. I had thrown away any thought of trying to kill it by myself. I let out a sigh. Just as I was about to open the party recruitment window, a voice itched in my ears. In the corner of my eyes, a small window had appeared.

[Ellos Von Kasina invited you to a party. Would you like to accept?]

“Eh...?”

What’s this? Don’t tell me they couldn’t finish it off? I tilted my head and accepted the invite. Just like before, I felt a tinge of dizziness engulf me. Before I knew it, I was surrounded by all the members of the previous party.

“Ah, you accepted, Mister Kang Shin.”

“Mister Ellos...”

I stared at him with a look of bewilderment. He reached out with his hand and I met it with my own hand. I looked around and once more reaffirmed that everyone from the previous party was here. Although I would have preferred otherwise, Palludia and the others of the Luka continent were also here. However, unlike her past confident self, she was looking down, dejected. It wasn't hard to understand why.

“Did you guys... fail?”

“Mm, it's embarrassing to admit, but yes. We were wiped out.”

“Wiped out...”

“Hahaha, floor masters are said to be extremely strong. It would be weird if we succeeded on our first or second try.”

Although Ellos was trying to laugh it off, Palludia wasn't buying it. This time, however, the target of her resentment was different.

“It's my fault...”

“Haha, it's not just Palludia-nim's fault.”

“It's my fault. I got too heated and let Orc die...”

“If by Orc, you're talking about me, it looks like you haven't learned your lesson yet.”



“Eeek! ... huu.”

Palludia seemed like she would burst after what I said, but she calmed herself back down when the rapier-woman poked her sides. When I looked at Ellos, he made a bitter smile as he shook his head. I knew she wasn't really feeling apologetic, but it would be enough if she wouldn't repeat the same mistake as last time. I let out a sigh.

“I don't have to kill two orcs again before I enter, right?”

“Haha, of course not. We know fully well how capable you are. If you perform like last time, we'll do our best to fulfill our roles.”

“Kuk...”

“Please, mate. We all believe in you!”

“You were amazing last time.”

“T-Take care of us.”

“Mm, you're reliable just like your looks. Oppa, you would be just my style if you lost some weight. Your face is handsome too...”

The last one was from the rapier-carrying woman. No matter who looked, I was the younger one! Also, this wasn't fat, it's

muscle!

## Chapter 6. Boy Becomes A Dungeon Explorer (6)

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“Kuaaaaa! Humans, I’ll take care of you at once!”

“Tankers go take its aggro! Miss Shuna, stand by so you can take their place at any time!”

“Orc Lord you bastard, it won’t be so easy this time!”

“I-I’ll do my best!”

“Everyone else, start taking care of the other orcs!”

“Even if you don’t say that, Mr. Kang Shin’s on his fourth orc!”

Perhaps because we had experience coordinating before, the battle this time went much smoother. The man named Paul wielded his shield proficiently and blocked the Orc Lord, and the rest of us took care of the orcs more quickly than before.

“Kuaaaa!”

[Orc Lord used Warcry! It cleanses itself of all negative status effects. Because there are no orc minions in range, Orc Lord’s attack power increases by 100% and defense lowers by 50%. It temporarily becomes super-armored.]

---

“Paul!”

“I know, I can take it!”

Even though Orc Lord used Warcry again, Paul was prepared for it and did not die like before. He skillfully dodged its attacks and pushed it back with his shield. Palludia also looked on with her eyes opened wide as she furiously cast heal after heal.

“We’ll sweep from the left!”

“There’s an orc archer!”

“It’s shooting!”

“Oppa, your side is open!”

“You just pay attention to that glaive coming at you from behind.”

We communicated to each other continuously as we defeated the orcs one by one. As a result of our hard-fought effort, we were able to take care of all fourteen orcs without suffering a single casualty. Paul was also still holding his ground against the Orc Lord.

“Alright! We’ll start going after the Orc Lord now!”

Just like we had planned before, we took turns and attacked the Orc Lord. Although the Orc Lord turned its attention to the one that dealt a blow, we quickly weaved out afterwards and Paul redrew its attention with his shield blow. It was just like tanking and dealing damage in an online game.

“Haap!”

“Kuaak!”

“Kuk, Mister Kang Shin, your attacks are so strong that it’s hard to retake the Orc Lord’s focus!”

“S-Sorry, I’ll be lighter next time.”

“Hmph, as expected, Orc is no good!”

““Miss Palludia, just focus on your healing!””

“Hiing...”

Because other party members took the initiative to silence Palludia when she lashed out at me, she could only swallow her words and focus on healing. Serves you right!

Sometime after we started to attack the Orc Lord, just as we were thinking it should fall soon, the Orc Lord suddenly let out an eerie

shriek.

“KUAAAAAAA!”

[Orc Lord used Warcry! It cleanses itself of all negative status effects. Because there are no orc minions in range, Orc Lord's attack power increases by 100% and defense lowers by 50%. It temporarily becomes super-armored.]

“What!?”

Everyone fell back. Only Paul was capable of withstanding the Orc Lord's attack under its normal condition. With its attack power doubled, even he couldn't speak for certain.

“I will kill all you humans!”

The Orc Lord put strength into its glaive. In that instant, I saw a black aura gathering on the glaive's blade. It was similar to some of the skills the other party members used. Could that be mana? So that's qi! Although I knew how dangerous it was to get worked up, I couldn't help it.

“It's dangerous! Everyone fall back!”

“It's useless! Guaaaaaa!”

It held its glaive horizontally and cleaved through the air. Surprisingly, the mana gathered on the glaive followed the glaive's trajectory and shot forward. It was like a game character using a sword blast.

“You’ll die if you get hit! Everyone run!”

“Uwooooooh!”

Everyone scattered frantically. Although I wanted to run as well, I caught sight of Palludia who was standing in place frozen.

“What are you doing, run!”

“M-My feet won’t move...”

“You won’t really die anyways! What are you afraid of!?”

“T-Then it’s fine if I die!”

“What!? Last time, you said something about a week being important!”

Ugh, there’s no time to argue! I quickly rushed to her, grabbed her in my embrace and flung my body. Right afterwards, I sensed my hairs being pulled as I fell to the ground with Palludia. Dust went in my mouth and I felt a strong sense of disgust.

“Mister Kang Shin, Miss Palludia! Are you okay!?”

“W-We’re alive!”

“Cough cough...”

Because it was still dangerous, I got up in a hurry. I still held Palludia as I ran back as fast as I could. The Orc Lord let out a bloodcurdling cry as it chased after us.

“Now!”

“Got it!”

Two archers aimed at the Orc Lord’s eyes. Although one missed, the other correctly pierced through the Orc Lord’s right eye. The Orc Lord then held its eye and cried out miserably.

“Kuaaaaaa!”

“H-How long are you going to hug me, Orc!”

“I’m not hugging you because I want to!”

Setting the Orc Lord’s cry as the BGM, I threw Palludia down on the ground. Even until the end, she did not say thanks. Her bottom



hit the ground and she glared at me with teary eyes. I couldn't feel more satisfied. Who cares if you're pretty? I wouldn't want a truck-load of irritating brats like you!

“Orc, you meanie!”

“Shut it, you mean bit... person.”

I considered calling her a b\*tch, but it seemed wrong to curse at a girl, so I toned it down. Even so, she seemed to be shocked. As we were about to fight, Ellos shouted at us from afar.

“It's not the time have a lover's quarrel! We have to quickly finish it off!”

““It's not a lover's quarrel!””

We glared at each other one last time then split. I went toward the Orc Lord, she went toward the safer backline to focus on her healing. Although the Orc Lord used its sword blast move again, we were able to dodge it, having seen it before. In fact, right after it used the sword blast attack, it left itself wide open for attack.

In the end, the Orc Lord fell, its throat pierced by the spear I had put all my strength into.

“Kuk, strong humans... good... fight...”

“This bastard’s acting cool at the end.”

Watching the Orc Lord annoying me until the end, I kicked its head. The Orc Lord didn’t manage to finish what it was saying and fainted. Everyone else clapped and told me I did a great job. Immediately afterwards, flashes of light surged out from our body. This was the fifth time it had happened – a level up.

[You reached level 6. You obtained the qualification to enter the 6th floor.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[You obtained 1,000 gold. It is distributed evenly amongst party members. You received 100 gold.]

[Rewards will be distributed in order of contribution.]

[Kang Shin-nim’s contribution is the highest. Choose your reward.]

Ah, I see. Just like in games, it seemed boss monsters dropped several items. Additionally, because my contribution was the highest, I was the first one to choose a reward. A boss fight really was different.

Before I looked at the list of rewards, I eyed the other party

members. Everyone simply nodded in agreement.

“We acknowledge your contribution. You should rightly be the first one to choose!”

“It would indeed have been hard without you. I can’t believe they expect anyone to beat this thing. I understand why some people have been stuck for over 10 years.”

“Everyone worked hard, but you worked the hardest. You dealt the most damage too.”

“Agreed. You were cool, oppa.”

... Eh, why did I feel like crying? How long had it been since anyone has complimented me? My father rarely complimented when we trained. Before I raised my intelligence, my grades at school weren’t good, so teachers never complimented me either.

My mother didn’t acknowledge anywhere below my head to be her son. Even my sister acted awkward around me. Because I felt like crying, I desperately held it in.

“T-Then I will...”

Because this felt like Palludia’s time to interrupt, I glanced at her, but she simply gave a light humph and said nothing. Smiling, I looked at the list of rewards.

- [ 1. Orc Lord's Glaive
2. Power Earring
3. Rescue Balm
4. Power Potion
5. Steel Boots
6. Steel Shield
7. 200 Gold
8. Muscle Compressing Elixir
9. Fireball Magic Book
10. Mana Potion]

At first glance, only number 1, the Orc Lord's Glaive, seemed to be a rare item. Considering its sheer size, it could easily be considered a spear. It indeed looked very nice to have, but...

## 8. Muscle Compressing Elixir

The moment I saw it, I reached out and touched it. Then, a small, black pill appeared in my hands. I instinctively examined its info.

[Muscle Compressing Elixir (Rare)]

When consumed, the body's muscles will be compressed to be more shapely and strong. The muscle size will decrease, but their strength and dexterity will increase. It is the ideal item for a warrior. However, if one does not have enough muscles, it will have little effect. In fact, it may deal permanent damage to the body.]

“T-This is it.”

I muttered unconsciously. Although Ellos who was 2nd in contribution stared at me with confused eyes, seeing that the best item was still on the list, I did not care. Muscle Compressing Elixir! This was it!

“Thank you, God!”

I finally found a way to put these overly grown muscles to rest! I thanked God I never paid attention to the jeers and let out tears of joy. Everyone else was looking at me like I was crazy.

Well, although I had expected it to some extent, just eating one elixir didn't make me slender. However, I did feel that my body's width had decreased by a bit. At the same time, an alert popped up in front of my eyes.

[Your muscles become compressed, making them more powerful and dexterous. Both strength and dexterity stat permanently increases by 1.]

“Great, great.”

Unlike the saying you couldn't be content after one cup of beer, I was very content. I finally found a way to reduce my muscles.

‘I'll first climb to the 10th floor and obtain a mana cultivation method. Then, I'll just go around looking for more Muscle Compressing Elixirs!’

# Chapter 7. Boy Becomes A Dungeon Explorer

## (7)

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As I was lost in my thoughts, everyone had finished collecting their rewards. Ellos clapped his hands and drew everyone's attention.

“Good work today everyone. Without each and every one of you, we would have failed to defeat the Orc Lord. As fellow comrades climbing the dungeon, it would be great to stay in touch.”

“Stay in touch? How?”

“Ah, so you don't know. You can send a friend request, and you'll be able to contact each other whenever you are both in the dungeon.”

“I see.”

At Ellos words, I realized there was still a lot to learn about the dungeon's functionalities. I registered Ellos as a friend. Although I didn't really want to register Palludia as a friend, because she sent a deathly glare my way, I friended her as well. If I friended Ellos and not Palludia, it seemed she would throw a tantrum.

“Then will you be heading to the 6th floor now, Mr. Kang Shin?”

“Yep. My goal is to beat the 10th floor.”

“Uh... that...”

“...?”

Ellos seemed to want to say something, but he dropped his head down.

“N-No, it’s nothing. Um... good luck. Call me if you ever need help. I will help you as much as I can.”

“Mmm.... Got it.”

What could it be? I tilted my head in wonder, but because I felt Ellos’ sincerity, I nodded my head.

The party disbanded. I was sent back to the place I was before. It was the place beyond the boss room, the Floor Shop next to the stairway to the 6th floor. I went to the Floor Shop to check if there was anything special to buy, but confirmed that there was nothing. As I walked to the stairway energetically, the shop noona cheered me on with a smile.

“Do your best! Ghosts suck out and consume human energy!”

“Thanks, noona! ... Ghosts?”

Thinking that the 6th floor sounded more grim than the 5th, I



yelled ‘commence exploration.’ In an instant, darkness surrounded me.

“... Eh?”

– Shuuu

“... Eh?”

Did I hear something? I felt goose bumps running down my arm.

‘This is just the atmosphere I hate.’

I gulped down my saliva and walked forward. The next moment, something crept up on me abruptly.

“Ugyaaaah!”

As I let out a scream I could never let my father hear and fell, something white attacked me with a curious sound.

“Hukiiiiiii!”

“Ugyaaaah!”

Ghosts are scary! I thrashed out with my fists, but they passed through it easily. It wasn’t defeated. I instinctively felt that it had

not even been hit.

[Wraith has tainted your soul! Because you have no MP, your HP will decrease continuously.]

“Hukiiiiii!”

“Ugyaaaah!”

There was more than just the one! Several ghosts appeared and attacked me. I didn’t even consider using my spear as I screamed from the top of my lungs and thrashed out with my arms and legs. They had no effect whatsoever, and my HP continued to be drained. In the end, my HP had reached 0 and I was kicked out of the dungeon. It was a rather embarrassing exit.

“Father!”

“Uwoah! What are you yelling for!?”

“You lied to me!”

“About what?”

“I haven’t seen a single mana stone this entire time. There are wraiths on the 6th floor. Without qi, you can’t defeat them at all!

Tell me honestly, what floor are you on?”

“... Well, you see, son.”

“What floor are you on?”

When I glared at him intently, my father finally answered.

“T-The 6th.”

“Faaaaatheeeeer!”

When I shouted, my father flinched.

“Ehem. What’s wrong, Shin? You can earn a lot of gold just by defeating orcs on the 5th floor. It’s with that money that I bought this house, car, and your mother’s bag. See, your father makes good money.”

“For someone who’s only been to the 5th floor, you sure talk big...!”

“Hmph, you won’t be much different. You’ll be hunting orcs forever.”

“Fatheeer!”

Rather than cheering me up, he was making fun of me! I thought about grabbing him by the collar and fighting, but seeing mother and Yua staring at us through the door crack, I put away the thought.

“Huu. I didn’t become a dungeon explorer just to hunt orcs...”

“Shin, this is not a chance everyone can have. Orcs give 10 gold, which can be exchanged for 20,000 won. Three orcs for 20,000 won. Do you realize how rich this mine is?”

“But father...”

“What’s wrong?”

“I want to have qi!”

“You...!”

Father looked at me with a touched expression. His body was trembling. Suddenly, he embraced me. No, it was more like a wrestling move.

“Like you can obtain qi when even I couldn’t! You better not get it before I do!”

“We’re done father! DONE!”

In the end, I went back to the 5th floor. But I didn't want to just hunt orcs all day. Having experienced the thrill of fighting the Orc Lord, ordinary orcs were no longer enough to satisfy me. Now that things had come to this, I decided to obtain more muscle compressing elixirs. I chose to enter a party and fight the Orc Lord again.

Of course, there were many hurdles. First, it turned out that I could only fight the floor master once a day. Even if I succeeded, I could only try again the next day. Of course, if I failed, I couldn't enter the dungeon for a whole week. The Orc Lord was not a weak foe by any means. As a result, I was kicked out of the dungeon with a fifty percent chance no matter what party I was in.

Plus, the muscle compressing elixir did not always come out. I wasn't always the one to get the 1st place contribution either. Sometimes, I was left with just power potions, which temporarily granted a strength bonus, and low-grade potions.

There was a good news as well. The reason my body was so big was not only because my muscles were overinflated, but also because my bones themselves were large. Simply put, I had the bones of a dragon. About half a year after I succeeded in my first Orc Lord hunt, when it was the 14th time I defeated the Orc Lord, a new compressing elixir had appeared.

#### [Bone Compressing Elixir (Rare)]

When consumed, the body's bones will be compressed to be smaller and stronger. However, if one's bones are already

compressed to the maximum, consuming it may have no effect or even kill in the worst case scenario.]

“Whoo!”

I jumped in place just like the first time I obtained the Muscle Compressing Elixir. I immediately consumed the Bone Compressing Elixir, and this time, my constitution went up by 1 permanently.

Consuming compressing elixirs didn't always increase my stats, but they did increase from every time to time. As such, it wasn't such a bad thing that I repeatedly hunted the Orc Lord. Most importantly, fighting a strong opponent like the Orc Lord played a vital role in quickly increasing my low-rank martial arts skill.

After a whole year passed, it was getting easier and easier to hunt the Orc Lord. It seemed like there was an unknown network amongst the dungeon explorers as when I created a party, the people who joined would ask if I'm the 'Crown Prince.' When I asked them what they meant by Crown Prince, they answered it was the nickname given to me who specialized in hunting the 5th Floor Master. The official title was Crown Prince of 5F.

“C-Crown Prince...”

I somehow gained a humiliating nickname. Of course, I knew it was a way of acknowledging my strength. Having faced the Orc Lord for a year, I grew strong enough to defeat the Orc Lord

without losing a single party member.

My stats that were going up slowly through the muscle and bone compressing elixirs was one reason, but the more important reason was the stronger martial art skill, which had grown just as strong as my spear technique. With it, I could quickly read and react to the orcs' every move.

Someone had also contacted me after a year. It was Ellos. He had told me he was now going through the 9th floor.

[Sorry. If only I could teach you my mana cultivation method...]

“It’s fine. I know it’s your family secret. I heard you couldn’t trade things bought from the Floor Shop either. That’s my luck, I guess.”

[In other dungeons, ghosts didn’t appear until after the 10th floor. It’s unfortunate you became an explorer of the First Dungeons... what a shame.]

“Like I said, that’s just my luck.”

I could feel Ellos’ concern. I also understood what Ellos was about to tell me a year ago.

Three months after Ellos contacted me, someone unexpected contacted me. It was Palludia. I never thought I would see or talk to her again.

[... I heard you're still on the 5th floor.]

“Tsk, where are you?”

[H-Hmph, I'm already on the 13th floor. I'm different than you.]

“Good for you...”

It wasn't sarcasm. I really was jealous of her. I didn't become a dungeon explorer just to make money. Treasures, monsters, exploration! I wanted to experience new things. I wanted to fight with more diverse, more stronger monsters.

Although I knew Palludia would make fun of me, I didn't really care much about it now that a whole year had passed.

[I-If... If it angers you that much, hurry up climb up! There's no time to dawdle on the 5th floor!]



---

“But I have no mana.”

[Eek, do something about that with your spirit! You saved me twice, so you should be able to do at least that!]

“... Heh.”

What, is she trying to cheer me up? Although I could only hear her voice, I knew she wasn't making fun of me. I felt like I had received a surprise present.

[W-What...]

“Thanks.”

[Uet!? I didn't do anything you should be thankful for!]

“I'm just thankful. You cheered me up. I'll try harder.”

[Uuuu... do what you want! Next time, you contact me first,

stupid!"]

Then she hung up. I kept my eyes closed for a while, then slapped my cheeks and got up.

“Alright, let today’s hunting begin!”

# Chapter 8. The World Becomes A Dungeon

## (1)

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About two years after I first defeated the Orc Lord, any party I was in no longer knew defeat.

No matter how messed up the party composition was, even if a worthless explorer joined, I had no problem defeating the Orc Lord.

I defeated an Orc Lord everyday without exception, and the 100 gold reward stockpiled slowly.

With the increased number of times I succeeded in defeating the Orc Lord, I naturally had more opportunity to obtain a Muscle or Bone Compressing Elixir. Now, just eating one or two wasn't enough to raise my stats. I had to eat at least ten.

The amount of free stat points I gained through muscle and bone compressing elixirs was 28. It was just short of the amount gained from 6 level ups. I knew I was level 6, yet not really level 6.

One day, because no Muscle or Bone Compressing Elixir had dropped, I chose the Orc Lord's Glaive. It was just about when my wooden spear was completely worn out. In truth, it was surprising I lasted so long with a wooden spear. Once I began carrying around the glaive, the way people saw me changed. It became easier to find my place in parties. It was the first time I realized the importance of weapons.

Once I had the Orc Lord's Glaive, my attack power increased exponentially. Sometime later, I found myself wearing a leather helm, leather gloves, and leather armor. They were all equipment dropped by the Orc Lord.

"Crown Prince..."

"It's the Crown Prince..."

"Yes, after 5 years, I can finally escape the 5th floor!"

My name became more and more well-known. When I began recruiting party members, all ten slots filled up in an instant. Other dungeon explorers also called me the 'one who leads the path past the 5th floor' and 'Savior Incarnate.' Although I tried to stop the embarrassing nicknames from spreading, it was of no use.

Because I didn't want to make money by hunting orcs like my father, once I defeated the Orc Lord, I left the dungeon and studied. I had to make use of my 20 intelligence stat. My grades at school went up. My mother was happy and the number of universities I could attend went up.

No matter how much money I made from the dungeon, it was my mother's opinion that I had to attend a university when I graduated from high school. I could do little to resist my mother. In truth, the thought of attending a university excited me. It was something I couldn't have even dreamed of when my intelligence was low.

Yes, other than the fact that I couldn't obtain mana, everything was perfect.

I focused my efforts on the Orc Lord Raids and paid little attention to maintaining a social life at school (not that I had one to maintain in the first place). One day, I had been called to part of the school teachers rarely visited.

I was nervous, wondering if delinquents were trying to pick a fight with me. Instead, a familiar girl had appeared. She was from my class. Contrary to her usual cheerful and enthusiastic self, her head was drooped down like she was an entirely different person.

“I-I like you.”

“... Huh?”

Who? This cute girl? Me? She likes me?

I thought it was a joke. Even though I was taking muscle and bone compressing elixirs, I was still the person who was once called an orc. When I asked if she was joking, she began crying and ran off.

“Why are you crying!?”

“I-I wasn't kidding! Uwaaah!”

A rumor had spread throughout school that I was rejecting girls. When I came home and told my mother and sister about it, they stared at me as if they had just heard the most ridiculous thing.

“W-What?”

“You didn’t notice?”

“Oppa... stupid...”

“Eh? Stupid? I’m not stupid anymore...”

“Stupid.”

“Kuk.”

An unsolvable mystery was created that day.

Half a year after that, I began to think whether I needed all ten members to defeat the Orc Lord. Just as a test, I went into battle with just eight people, but it was still extremely easy. The ones who came in with me made expressions of disbelief.

“It worked...”

“But how?”

“It’s... a bug...”

Bugs referred to monsters that dropped an unusually high amount of gold or a high-grade item that normally would not drop on that floor. They were considered treasures, created from mistakes by the ones who operated the dungeons. But it seemed I was being treated like a bug.

“Hahahaha.”

“This is no laughing matter, Crown Prince.”

“He’s right, Crown Prince. You should hurry up and head to a higher floor.”

“Stop calling me Crown Prince.”

I retorted bluntly and checked the list of rewards. It was then that I seemed to be struck by lightning.

[ 1. Orc Lord’s Glaive

2. Power Potion

3. Middle Potion

4. Skin Compressing Elixir

5. Orc Lord's Boots

6. Muscle Compressing Elixir

7. Mana Potion

8. 230 Gold]

‘No way! Am I seeing this correctly?’

I washed my eyes and looked at the list of rewards again. Orc Lord's Boots. This was the first time I had seen it in 2 years of hunting the Orc Lord. There was something else that surprised me. Skin Compressing Elixir! I was thinking about how my skin wasn't reducing at the rate that my muscle and bones were reducing.

Without a shred of hesitation, I chose the skin compressing elixir.

[Skin Compressing Elixir (Rare)

Warning. When someone who has not consumed both muscle and bone compressing elixir consumes this elixir, one could



experience severe pain and permanent bodily damage. For those that consumed both muscle and bone compressing elixir, this elixir will make one's stretched out skin tighter and stronger, boosting one's defense and giving the skin a clean, hard texture.]

I ate it, and my constitution increased. It was the start of a new grind.

When the number of people decreased, new items appeared on the reward list. When I thought about it, it made sense. Quantity decreased and quality increased.

I hunted in a party of eight for a while, then switched to seven, then six, then five. Even then, everything went smoothly. Skin compressing elixirs appeared more often, and muscle and bone compressing elixirs always appeared.

I compressed my body endlessly. The more I repeated it, the smaller and stronger I became. When I realized my 210cm height had gone down to 190cm, the winter break of my 3rd year of high school had started.

“No way...”

Standing in front of a mirror, it was all I could mutter. The mirror was now capable of capturing my whole body without problem. Did I become blind when I focused on a topic? Although I washed myself every day, it was only now that I was seeing the

changes in my body.

The me in front of the mirror was a normal young man. No, I wasn't exactly normal. Those who worked out could easily see through the strength hidden in my muscles.

On the outside, I was more than enough to be described as slim. More importantly, my muscles weren't repulsing to look at anymore. In fact, it was the opposite. My body had finally matched my face, which took after my mother's good looks. Although I felt like I was still a bit too tall, it was nothing to complain about.

“Huu...”

Feeling a sense of fulfillment, I sighed silently. It was a long journey, but I had finally done it. To be exact, no matter how much compressing elixirs I took, my stats wouldn't increase anymore. So I quit.

After taking elixirs for almost 3 years, I had gained a total of 40 stat points. 10 strength, 10 dexterity, and 20 constitution. Just with my status alone, I would be evenly matched with level 14 explorers.

“Ellos and Palludia must have passed the 15th floor now...”

I murmured bitterly and let out another sigh. The fact that I couldn't use mana had tied me down to the 5th floor for 3 years. I felt sorry for myself. I then realized my father must have felt the same.

It must be why he was going around talking about getting qi at such an age.

[Name: Kang Shin Race: Human Sex: Male

Class: None Title: None Rank: Bronze 7

Level: 6

HP – 1,940/1,940 MP – 0

Strength – 34(+2) Dexterity – 30 Constitution – 39

Intelligence – 20 Magic – 0 Charm – 16 Luck – 10

Skill – Low-rank Martial Arts (Master), Low-rank Spear Technique (Master), Mid-rank Spear Technique (Master)]

Was this the status of a level 6 explorer? The answer was yes. I didn't believe it either, but it was the truth.

What was strange was that my charm stat had gone up by itself. It was 7 initially, but it had gone up until it was 16. Because the charm and luck stat were bonus stats and you could not distribute status points to them, I didn't pay much attention to them.

Most importantly, my magic stat was still 0. Compared to the HP I had, it looked completely barren.

My equipment were entirely from the Orc Lord. Its helmet, chestplate, leggings, boots, gloves, and glaive. On one ear, I even had an Orc Lord's Earring, which raised the strength stat by 2 points.

If I walked around Myung Dong like this, would they think I was cosplaying? I quickly erased the thought from my mind. With how the world was these days, it wouldn't be surprising if someone really attacked me thinking I was a monster.

"It looks like I'm ready."

If you ask what I'm ready for, it was obvious. It was killing the Orc Lord solo!

I had always kept the possibility in my mind. The reward increased as the number of explorers in the party decreased. If I succeeded in defeating it alone, what reward would I get? As far as I knew, there was no one who managed to defeat the Orc Lord alone. The reason was simple. Once one defeated the floor master, it was impossible to go back and hunt the previous floor master.

In other words, explorers above level 11 could not come back to the 5th floor to kill the Orc Lord. Those below that did not even think about hunting the floor master alone. If there was such a person, it would be someone who grinded through elixirs year

after year just like me. I had asked father about the elixirs, but he said that as the man in charge of the house, he gave up hunting the Orc Lord and focused on hunting as many orcs as possible. It was likely to be the same with others in a similar situation as father. Someone who could pass the 6th floor did not need to kill the Orc Lord.

That is, I was the first. I should be. I would like to be.

I did not want to just try it. If I was doing it, I wanted to succeed. Pressing down on the Orc Lord's Helmet, I stood in front of the huge stone door.

“Huu... here I go.”

Then, just like 3 years ago, I pushed open the stone door and shouted.

“Orc Lord! Fight me!”

# Chapter 9. The World Becomes A Dungeon

## (2)

---

“Orc Lord! Fight me!”

“Chwiiiik!”

The spawn locations of the fourteen orc minions were limited. The moment I entered the room, I realized which spawn pattern the orcs were in, and charged towards the orc closest to me.

Because of Warcry, it was impossible to kill the Orc Lord while ignoring the orc minions. As such, you had to quickly take care of the minions. The Orc Lord’s attacks hurt no matter what, but when he used Warcry alone, his defense also decreased by 50 percent. As such, it was necessary to kill all the minions.

“Kuwaaak!”

“Chwiik!”

“Human!”

“Fast!”

Now, I could send the trash mob orcs’ heads flying by just slashing with my weapon. It was one of the pros of using a glaive. It could stab, but it was more powerful when used to slash. Plus,

the Orc Lord's Glaive was a rare-grade item. It was different than a wooden spear.

“Kuaaa!”

Seeing his minions drop like flies, the Orc Lord stretched his back and roared. He was using Warcry! However, I had already cut down more than half the orcs.

“You won't have a chance to!”

One more, one more! My body moved exactly like I had calculated. Like a farmer harvesting his crops, I quickly cut down the orcs' heads. With the slight speed bonus from the Orc Lord's Boots, it seemed even easier. When the Orc Lord finally finished his Warcry, there were no orc minions left in the room.

[Orc Lord used Warcry! It cleanses itself of all negative status effects. Because there are no orc minions in range, the Orc Lord's attack power increases by 100% and defense lowers by 50%. It temporarily becomes super-armored.]

“Kuaaaa! You dare!”

“I've heard that line over a thousand times already!”

I charged toward the super-armored Orc Lord without hesitation.

I knew the Orc Lord's attack patterns in and out. I had already experienced it to near boredom. In truth, the fight was already over when I cut down all the orc minions.

A super-armored monster ignored incoming attacks and focused on its own attacks. However, it had its disadvantages. Because you did not stop at all, you sometimes ended up taking more damage.

As a result, it was much easier to land a critical hit, which dealt more than double the usual damage and sometimes even damaged the target permanently. Of course, it was easier for the Orc Lord to deal critical damage to others under the super-armor effect, but you just had to not get hit.

Like now!

“Haaap!”

“Kuaaak!”

[Critical Hit! You dealt a deadly blow!]

As I rolled on the ground to dodge his attack, I swung my glaive and cut his Achille tendon. Because he was in his super-armor state, he kept charging forward regardless. As a result, his wound only became worse. When its super-armor state ended, it would face an unimaginable pain.



“HUMAAAAAN!”

“Even if you don’t tell me, both the heavens and my cute sister know I’m human!”

At the Orc Lord charging forward due to super-armor, I continuously attacked with my glaive from the back. When it hit the wall and stopped, I slashed down on his back and jumped back.

“You will not escape alive!”

Here it comes! The Orc Lord raised his glaive and black mana began to gather around it with a ringing sound. It was the skill that drove me mad with jealousy every time I saw it! Sword Blast! I had already figured out the time it took to charge, and all the angle and direction patterns. I slid to the side, dodging the Sword Blast with ease. Using the small opening it had after using Sword Blast, I stabbed my glaive through his belly.

“Kuuaak!”

“Whoops, that was close.”

I distanced myself from the Orc Lord thrashing about randomly. At least 10 minutes had passed since the battle began, but the Orc Lord still seemed healthy as it roared incessantly. If there was a difference between games and the dungeon, it was the HP bar. No matter how much I wished for it, I couldn’t see how much HP the

enemy monsters had left.

“DIE, HUMAAAAN!”

After the Sword Blast was the random thrashing. It swung its arms and legs everywhere and made a complete mess of the surroundings. This skill gave off powerful vibrations and powerful blows, which easily disrupted even the most well-organized parties. I couldn't find a good solution to this attack even after fighting it close to a thousand times. If I approached it now trying to attack, I could die with a single misstep. When the Orc Lord was also under the super-armor effect, the damage done couldn't be described with words. That was exactly the case now.

“DIEEE!”

“Would you jump into a charging bulldozer because someone told you to?”

“DIEEE!”

“Alright, alright, I'll kill you, just wait a little.”

Thankfully, it wasn't so difficult to dodge it. I just had to keep running back when it started thrashing around. If it chased after me, I just had to draw circles around it as I retreated. Because the room was rather large, it wasn't so hard to do. Additionally, after this phase ended, it stood in place and drew its breath for a little while.

This was the best chance to counterattack.

“DIEEE!”

Ignoring the fact that I was making fun of its speech earlier, I charged toward the Orc Lord shouting the same thing it had been shouting. In my hands were the Orc Lord’s Glaive. My target was... its thigh!

Crack!

“Kuaaaak!”

“Alright, it went in!”

The super-armor state had already ended. The Orc Lord dropped its weapon in pain and wrapped its arms around its thigh. When the Orc Lord received damage surpassing a certain threshold, it dropped its weapon. This was another great chance to attack. Excited, I stabbed my glaive through the other thigh.

[Critical Hit!]

With luck, I even got a critical hit! When the Orc Lord received huge damage while it had its weapon dropped, it would just fall in

place. It would then faint and stay unconscious for a period of time. I won. This battle was mine!

“Haaaaap!”

I aimed my glaive at the Orc Lord’s throat, which was at a perfect height for me to do so. Although I couldn’t pierce through it, I had dealt the damage. Of course, I wouldn’t be satisfied with just one attack. I stabbed with my glaive a couple more times. Then, a thick stream of blood exploded out.

Did I get too excited? I forgot to control myself and stabbed its throat one more time. It was then that the Orc Lord opened its eyes.

“Kuaaaaa!”

[Orc Lord used Warcry! It cleanses itself of all negative status effects. Because there are no orc minions in range, the Orc Lord’s attack power increases by 100% and defense lowers by 50%. It temporarily becomes super-armored.]

“Damn! Kuk!”

He swung his fist and hit me. With just that, I flew back as my HP dropped tremendously. Thankfully, I did not hit the wall and just fell on the ground.

[Your HP fell below 30 percent. You are in need of urgent treatment.]

“Agh, damn it...!”

Losing too much blood too quickly, I couldn't move my body for a moment. Setting aside the pain I was feeling, I would definitely have died without the Orc Lord's defensive equipment set.

“DIEEEEE!”

It's charging! I put strength into my knees and got up. My legs were shaking. It wasn't easy to digest the damage from its fist.

“HUMAN, THIS IS THE END!”

“Kuk!”

I hurriedly took out a potion from my inventory and drank it. Once my HP recovered a little, it would become easier to move. However, the message I received was not the one I was expecting.

[You used a Power Potion. For 15 seconds, your strength is increased by 10.]

“Damn!”

It seemed like I would have to face him directly. I didn't have the time to drink an HP potion anymore, and my legs weren't fully recovered. They could only manage standing their ground.

‘Although this isn't what I had planned...’

I tightly gripped my glaive and looked forward. The Orc Lord was charging toward me in a straight line, its eyes glowing red. Its eyes were burning with love and the glaive in its hands were full of passion. It was truly the worst love confession.

“Whew... let's do this.”

Don't look down on my spearmanship because it's only mid-rank. What I learned could not be described by ranks like low and mid. It was a technique passed down from my ancestors. Their breath still lived on in it! Faster than lightning, stronger than a dragon, grander than Mt. Tai, and more delicate than the ocean! This was...

“DIE!”

“DIE!”

Well, it didn't have anything embarrassing like name! Thinking

rather useless things as the Orc Lord neared me, I thrust my glaive toward the Orc Lord's chest. If it could survive this, then I would be the one to die!

Puk!

I heard a sound. My attack had definitely hit its mark. The question was whether it died or not. Because my eyes were shut, I couldn't see if it was dead or if I was about to die. In an instant, everything became quiet as if all sounds in the world had disappeared. It like when you turned off the TV in the middle of the night.

Slowly, I opened my eyes.

“Hiik!”

The Orc Lord's face was right in front of mine. When I pulled out my glaive and stepped back, the Orc Lord fell with a thud. I blinked. This... could this be?

... Did I succeed?

[A Grand Accomplishment! You have defeated the Floor Master, Orc Lord, alone! Amazing!]

[You obtained the title 'Orc Lord Slayer.' All stats permanently increase by 1. This effect will apply even if the

title is not equipped.]

[You have become Bronze Rank 6. Congratulations.]

[You defeated the Orc Lord alone. You have obtained the special reward, Orc Lord's Pauldron.]

[You obtained 1,000 gold.]

[Choose your reward.]



## Chapter 10. The World Becomes A Dungeon (3)

[Choose your reward.]

[1. Deific Manifestation Magic Book]

“Agh, I’m getting dizzy.”

“Can’t the messages come slower?” I asked the message noona I had grown rather accustomed to as I checked the message log.

Let’s see... mm, a Grand Accomplishment. Just as I was thinking it only sounded grand and gave no rewards, I saw that I had gotten a title. Not to mention, it raised all of my stats by 1. I didn’t think my stats would increase again.

And the special reward, the Orc Lord’s Pauldron... I see it’s for my shoulders. Now that I thought about it, I had never seen the Orc Lord’s Pauldron before. That could only mean that it only dropped when you defeated the Orc Lord alone. In other words, it was impossible to collect all of the Orc Lord’s equipment until you defeated it alone.

... There was no equipment set this hard to collect in any game that I’ve played.

“Here it is. Wow, it looks amazing.”

I opened my inventory and equipped the Orc Lord’s Pauldron. My body was now entirely covered with the Orc Lord’s leather armor.

I had lasted until the 5th floor with just training clothes, but now that I thought about it, I might as well have been naked. I didn’t understand how I even thought of going into the dungeon like that. Even though you couldn’t re-enter the dungeon for a week if you died, I had only thought that they were easy to move in. Not to mention, I was also using my wooden spear... Thinking about those days, I couldn’t help but sigh in embarrassment.

As I was standing still in reminiscence, another message was heard.

[You equipped the Orc Lord Set. Your strength and constitution increases by 5. When the Orc Lord Set is equipped, you can use ‘Orc Lord’s Warcry’ once per day.]

“Ah!”

No way, it went up again! Although it seemed a little small compared to how hard it was to gather the full set, upon more careful consideration, 2 levels worth of stat points seemed fairly big. Not to mention, it would be weird if something from just the 5th floor was even better than this.

Although completing the Orc Lord Set or consuming compressing elixirs wasn't what I had planned from the very beginning, now that I had experienced it, I thought that perhaps this was the result that the one who led explorers into the dungeon had planned.

Checking how I looked in the full Orc Lord Set, I nodded my head with satisfaction and read the next line in the message log. 1000 gold. This was to be expected. The Orc Lord always gave 1,000 gold when defeated. The next was choosing my reward... but because I defeated the Orc Lord alone, there was only one reward on the list.

‘There's no choice here! Looks like message noona has to level up and raise her intelligence!’ Only thinking about such things and not letting it out of my mouth, I looked at the reward.

[1. Deific Manifestation Magic book]

“ ... ”

‘What's... this?’ I never expected to see [a magic named after me](#). Was it just created? What was it for? Was it something only I could use?

The MC's name, Kang Shin, directly translates to Deific Manifestation, the name of this skill (so he's confused)

Although I had numerous questions, I held myself back. Because

of my lack of mana, I couldn't use magic anyways. Just as I was thinking that...

[You have obtained the Deific Manifestation Magic. You can use all of your MP and half of your HP to call upon a soul connected deeply to your roots. The duration of manifestation will depend on the amount of MP and HP you use. You can only manifest someone of the Legendary rank or above, and you cannot use this skill again if you fail. On success, the skill has a cooldown time of one month. This magic has no skill level.]

“ ... ”

It felt like someone was playing a trick on me. Come to think of it, a lot of people use to do that when I was little, though it stopped as I became abnormally big...

This Deific Manifestation Magic. For a second, it reminded me of psychics. .

Of course, this magic would be useless on me. After all, I had no MP. There was no way I could use this skill. I let out a sigh. To think something I worked so hard to get would be of no use...

“Agh! Deific Manifestation, Deific Manifestation!” I shouted at the top of my lungs. Although I knew nothing would happen, I poured my heart out as I shouted. I will admit, I was slightly worried that I may have looked a little crazy shouting out my own

name. But...

[All of your MP has been consumed.]

[Half of your HP has been consumed.]

[You used 20 MP and 1,020 HP. For 1 minute and 40 seconds, you summon the Mythical Heroic Spirit, Peruta Rello Vatifoia.]

“... Eh?”

‘What? Did I see that right? 20? I thought I didn’t have a single MP?’ As I looked puzzled, I suddenly began to feel that my body wasn’t mine anymore. It was like I was wearing hundreds of clothes and could not move my body like I wanted.

Then, a voice rang out inside me.

[Oh, what is this boy? What a talent he possesses. Yet, he has no mana. Strange, very strange.]

“W-Who are you?”

I didn't look around like an idiot. I had already done so the first time I entered the dungeon.

[You were the one who called me. I am Peruta Rello Vatifofo, a spearman now long forgotten.]

“A spearman? You're a spearman? Wow! I use a spear too!”

[Hm? Hahaha! That's what I thought! Someone who can call me should no doubt use a spear! But this is concerning. Because of your lack of mana, I cannot stay for too long.]

“But I have no mana at all...”

[That's what I thought, but it turns out you have an extremely tiny amount! By the looks of things, I would guess you don't have a mana cultivation method. Am I correct?]

“Yeah, I have none. Sorry.”

[No need to be sorry. Since fate has connected us together, I will help... kuk, I already have to go back. Next time, I'll first teach you a mana cultivation method!]

“Y-Yes! Take care!”

Not knowing where exactly he was going, I shouted. When the stuffy feeling disappeared, I no longer heard any voices. At the same time, I felt my body go limp and became devoid of energy. Even after realizing Peruta disappeared, I remained still. I could not quite understand what had just happened.

“I thought I didn’t have mana? What happened...? Status!”

[Name: Kang Shin Race: Human Sex: Male

Class: None Title: Orc Lord Slayer Rank: Bronze 6

Level: 6

HP – 1,010/2,240 MP – 1/20

Strength – 34(+8) Dexterity – 30(+1) Constitution – 39(+6)

Intelligence – 20(+1) Magic – 0(+1) Charm – 16(+1) Luck – 10(+1)

Skill – Low-rank Martial Arts (Master), Low-rank Spear Technique (Master), Mid-rank Spear Technique (Master), Deific Manifestation]

“... Ha... Haha...”

I see, that was it! It was an extremely simple reason. 20 mana. I understood where this small amount came from.

When I earned the title Orc Lord Slayer, all my stats had gone up up by 1. Naturally, my magic went up as well!

I could not distribute points into it with the points I gained from leveling up, but it seemed that this was fine. This had to be a bug!

Of course, I had no intention of reporting it to a GM like I would in an online game. Well, not that I knew how to contact one anyways. In truth, I didn't know for sure whether this was a bug or not. What was important was that I finally had mana!

Excited, I couldn't help but dance.

‘YES! I finally have mana! I can learn a mana cultivation method from Peruta too! I can have qi! I can learn the high-rank spear technique!’

Just like that, on the winter break of my senior year of high school, I had found a solution to my goal of obtaining qi.



Of course, it took another month before I could meet Peruta again. He seemed prepared as the first thing he did upon being summoned was to imprint his mana cultivation method in my body.

Because of the pain where it felt like liquid iron was poured into my body, I couldn't help my tears from streaming down. However, tenacious to impart everything onto me, Peruta gave little care for the pain I was experiencing. After finishing his work in just 1 minute and 7 seconds, Peruta disappeared, saying,

[If you guide and circulate your mana through the pathway I left in your body, mana will naturally grow inside you.]

I stood still, looking like a woman who had just been raped by her trusted lover. What was more irritating was that Peruta was right. At first, it was hard to control the mana in my body, but as I moved it through the pathway he left, I became more relaxed and I could feel my body start to gather mana.

The only weird part was that cultivating mana became noticeably slower outside the dungeon. As such, I had to increase the time I spent inside the dungeon. I worked diligently to increase my mana. It was because Peruta said he would teach me spearmanship in a month. Although I heard that my family had an explosive spear technique that made use of qi, it was a story from long ago. Just when I thought I would have to learn the high-rank spear technique on my own, I had come across the perfect teacher,

Peruta.

When I could wield the high-rank spear technique to a certain level, I could finally conquer the 6th floor filled with those damned ghosts. It would have been well past 3 years and 2 months!

It had been a while, so I contacted Ellos and told him about what had happened. Surprised, Ellos shouted,

[Did you just say Peruta Rello Vatifoa!?!]

“Yep. He said he was a spearman. You know him?”

As we had exchanged messages for 3 years, we had long since become friends.

[I more than just know him. He’s from my continent. Well, even if I say that, he’s... from my continent’s myth.]

“Myth?”

Now that he mentioned it, I did seem to remember message noona saying something about a myth when I first summoned him.

[Yep, the creation myth at that. One sword, one spear, one shield, and one light. They laid a foundation in darkness and spread light into the world. Peruta Rello Vatifoia is the spear from that story. I thought it was just a myth, but you said you summoned him!?!]

“... Since you say that, I’m starting to think it’s not the same guy. He might be a fake.”

[There is power behind names. Even if he isn’t the same one from the myth, someone with the name Peruta Rello Vatifoia shouldn’t be ordinary. How much mana did you say you had?]

“Ah, it’s just over 700 now.”

[You... didn’t you say you started cultivating mana a month ago? That speed of growth isn’t normal. It can’t be an ordinary mana cultivation method.]

“R-Really?”

[Haha. You really know how to surpass my expectations.

Alright, let's beat the 25th Floor Master together.]

“That’s asking for too much.”

[Hahahaha.]

“Haha.”

I also tried contacting Palludia, but she didn’t pick up. Now that I thought about it, a year and a half had passed since she told me to contact her. It was when I was infatuated with compressing elixirs. Ah...

Because Ellos always contacted me first, I had naturally spent a lot of time talking to him. But Palludia had never contacted me since then. This was my fault. If she was mad, I couldn’t do anything about it. In the end, I left her a message and called it quits. In truth, I didn’t regret it at all!

# Chapter 11. The World Becomes A Dungeon

## (4)

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Apart from light shining down on my future as a dungeon explorer, my final day as a high schooler was approaching. It was graduation.

“The scent of the evergreen pine tree...”

At the auditorium, the school’s old fashioned and childish song was playing. Of course, none of the graduating students were paying attention to the song nor the principal’s instruction. Only when a few students were going up to the podium to receive awards did anyone check to see if it was someone they knew.

Just like that, my graduation ended. My sister came and handed me a flower bouquet.

She had long, straight hair and a doll-like face. Although her short height could be considered a flaw, other than that she had a body even a model would be jealous of. Her chest which wasn’t all that big could also be considered a flaw as well, but to my eyes, it was one of the things that made her perfect.

“Oppa, congratulations on graduating!”

“Thanks, Yua. How pretty.”

“Hehe, I picked it myself.”

“No, I meant you’re pretty. I wonder who your lucky brother is?”

“Ehehe, oppa.”

Seeing my sister laugh with such a lovable smile, I lightly hugged her. As my height went down to 190cm and my body no longer looked massive, Yua stopped instinctively trembling when she saw me. It was the dungeon that turned me into a human capable of communicating with my sister!

As I was enjoying happiness by holding the bouquet and embracing my sister, my mother slapped me on the head.

“Hey, stop right there! You’re both my son and daughter, so don’t get any weird ideas. If you want, I’ll even let you do a DNA test.”

“Eh, M-Mom.”

“Of course we’re your son and daughter. We take after your pretty looks.”

“Whew, after you started going to that dungeon, only your talking has gotten smoother.”

As I partied with explorers from other worlds for the last 3 years,

I too noticed that I had become a lot more sociable. Even in the short span of time where party members gathered to defeat the Orc Lord, a lot of internal problems could happen, just like what had happened between me and Palludia.

As a party leader, I learned to deal with situations like those. It almost felt like I learned a passive flattery skill, not that that's a good thing.

“Let's go to a restaurant! We can celebrate oppa's graduation with steak!”

“But Dad's not here.”

“Father's probably fooling around somewhere. Let's just go eat without him.”

A few days ago, when I met Peruta for the third time, he taught me the high-rank spear technique that made use of mana. The first technique allowed one to attack for a long time by lightly imbuing the spear with mana. The second technique was an explosive thrust where one instantly imbued a large amount of mana into the spear. With just these two techniques, I was able to easily tear through the wraiths on the 6th floor.

I could now move forward. What was more important was my father. He still did not have mana, and could only remain on the 5th floor.

Some time ago, I showed myself swinging my spear with mana. He then said as he grabbed my shoulders, “teach me.”

“Father, you see...”

I could not leave a mana pathway in his body like Peruta had done for me. He couldn't summon Peruta to his body either.

As a result, he decided to walk the same path I had. He would grind for compressing elixirs, obtain the Orc Lord equipment, and try for a 1-man boss fight. But because he was a lot smaller than me, I was worried that he wouldn't be able to ingest too many compressing elixirs. I made sure that he knew the negative effects of overdosing on compressing elixirs. As my father was the type to worry for his safety, I did not worry too much.

“So you're saying your father's in the dungeon?”

“Yep, he's probably fighting for his life right now.”

“Whew, when will he grow up...?”

“You know, he's going to get slimmer like me.”

“... Really?”

“He'll get stronger too.”



“...Gulp.” My mother swallowed.

In truth, father wasn't so bad looking. It was just that his body made him look muscle-brained. Seeing mother change from disparaging father to looking forward to his transformation, Yua made a dumbfounded expression.

“Whew, who's the adult here?”

“Hahaha.”

Seeing my sister act grown up was too cute, and I couldn't help myself from petting her head. Thinking how happy I was, I laughed. If only things continued like this... Of course, I knew my life would always be slightly more special than others'.

But life didn't always go as one expected.

That day, two moons rose above the sky. The world had begun to change.

Monsters appeared. Not inside the dungeon, but in the outside world.

“Breaking news. In Seoul's Ahyeon-dong, a 2 meter tall wolf appeared and began attacking people.”

“The two moons and the mutant animals. The relationship

between the two will be discussed by our panelist...”

“After ‘Two Moon,’ reports say that parts of the mountain ranges have changed formation and that the oceanic crust are acting up...”

“Members of the government are saying that a state of martial law must be proclaimed...”

“Reports say that mutant marine life have begun to attack major harbors and vessels. This incident, which is estimated to affect sea commerce, is...”

“Breaking news. A man seemingly fighting against the mutant life forms, which have shown to take little damage from guns and knives, saved several nearby citizens. Experts say this is an effect of the ‘Two Moon’...”

“At the same time that mutant life forms began appearing, people with the power to fight against them also appeared...”

“Mutants that suddenly struck humanity with calamity. Would you believe that these mutants possess a secret that could advance our medical and chemical knowledge by 100 years?”

After the so called ‘Two Moon,’ the world became a mess. The government had even barred its citizens from stepping outside our homes. Because of strange creatures that suddenly began appearing all over the world, 20 percent of the human population

suddenly died. Although various countries' militaries managed to drive them out, guns, knives, and even missiles were ineffective against them. These monsters flat out drove some countries to ruins, and feeling the danger of these monsters, the remaining countries formed an allied force against them. However, even the allied forces could only stop their advances by a little.

In this situation where Earth was going crazy, like vaccines, people that could fight against the monsters appeared.

Some beat down monsters with strange auras they imbued into their weapons, some burned them down with strange fires, and some twisted their necks off with telekinetic power.

Although they were weak by themselves, they could fight well against monsters in groups. As a result, the government began to gather these people with powers and formed new divisions to fight against the monsters.

In humanity's sudden moment of crisis, there was no time for countries to fight amongst themselves. Soon, a global anti-monster institution was established and monsters were chased out until they no longer appeared in areas populated by humans. Consequently, monsters began to gather in previously unpopulated areas or areas that had been abandoned by humans.

With this, the fight between ability users and mutant life forms seemed to slow down.

Ironically, the war resumed when scientific analysis of the

mutant life forms, now called monsters, finished. Surprisingly, the monsters' corpses themselves, substances extracted from them, and blue nuggets very rarely found inside them all seemed to possess significant value for use in science, medicine, the military and energy.

As a result, the government began to change the way they worked. They began to use these special divisions, formed to protect citizens, to instead collect these resources. People were very sensitive to this change, and under the pretext of protecting the rights of ability users, many left the government divisions and formed their own institutions.

Such phenomenon occurred on a global scale. In the end, two main structures emerged for ability user institutions. One was 'Guardian,' formed under the government. The other was 'Freedom Wing,' formed by independent ability users.

What was at first considered a calamity for humanity was now considered an important resource for human advancement.

“Father.”

“What’s up?”

“The world became a dungeon.”

“It did.”

We spoke as we watched an interview from a representative of Freedom Wing.

“Between fighting monsters in the dungeon and fighting monsters here, what do you think will earn more?”

“I don’t really care about money, but wouldn’t the monsters here give more money? They say it’s 200 million won for just one.”

“It looks easy, doesn’t it, son?”

“It does, father.”

“Want to go hunt some together?”

“It’ll be annoying if anyone finds out.”

“Who cares? We can just say we’re rogues.”

There were, of course, ability users who were not part of either Guardian or Freedom Wing. As Freedom Wing was once part of Guardian, it still had remnants of an organized structure. Ability users who disliked being tied down hunted individually or in small parties, then sold monster corpses to those that wanted them. It seemed trading centers for monster corpses were also in the making. According to the rumors, America already had them set up.

“It will be really annoying if we get branded as ability users. I’d rather go to dungeons. Besides, even if I hunt monsters here, I don’t get any stronger.”

“Is getting stronger all you care about?”

“Yep. I want to conquer the dungeon all the way to the 100th floor.”

According to Ellos, no one had ever reached the 100th floor of the dungeon. I wanted to see the 100th floor with my own eyes.

Although I was only level 7, if I traded all the gold I had accumulated from 3 years of hunting the Orc Lord, I would have more than 500 million won. It was an awful lot of money for someone who had not even gone to college yet. Ah, of course, colleges were currently closed due to monsters. The point was, I didn’t plan on doing anything bothersome just for money.

“Father, do you want to obtain an ability user license?”

“I’m thinking about it.”

“But you already earn a lot.”

“You can never have enough money.”

“What do you need more money for?”

“I can buy a bigger house, a bigger car, a bigger ring for your mother, more expensive clothes for Yua...”

“What about me?”

“You can make your own money.”

Father did not get licensed right away. It was partly because he had yet to obtain mana, but more importantly because the world wasn't yet stable. I agreed with his decision.

Although ability users were amazing human resources, beside the fact that they could fight against monsters, they were no different than normal human beings. It was impossible to know whether anything untoward would happen.

It took another half year before everything calmed down. It was a stormy period where the paradigm of human history was changing. Some sang of the end, while some sang of a new beginning.

My mother busily stockpiled canned food and ramen, my sister studied at home as schools were still closed, and my father continued to fight the Orc Lord in hopes of obtaining mana.

Of course, in that half a year, I devoted my entire time to the dungeon.

# Chapter 12. The World Becomes A Dungeon

## (5)

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“Haaaap!”

“Wooooo.”

“Shut it!”

I struck down a wraith with my mana-imbued spear. Although the weapon I was using was technically a glaive, because of the way I was using it, I often called it a spear. The wraith seemed to want to phase through my attack, but, unable to do so, it scattered into little pieces. Wraiths could not be damaged by physical attacks, but they were incredibly weak to magical attacks or attacks imbued with mana. It seemed the 6th floor was a place where those who could use mana were separated from those who couldn't.

According to Ellos, because no one in their party had a high-rank weapon technique, to fight against the wraiths they had to learn an applied skill that used mana. I, of course, knew the high-rank spear technique, so I could deal with the wraiths using that.

In any case, I was no longer on the 6th floor, but the 7th. Late at night two days ago, when I managed to plow through the 6th floor's wraiths and arrive at the 7th floor, I was met with even more wraiths. When I asked Ellos, he answered that wraiths appeared all the way until the end of the 10th floor.



For a little while, I was confident I wouldn't be fazed by any horror movies. With the wraiths popping out incessantly, I had grown too desensitized to be surprised.

I now had about 850 mana. Just when I was thinking that the growth speed was beginning to slow down, it jumped by about 100 when I leveled up to level 7. It was then that I realized that level ups acted as breakthroughs for slowed growth.

Level ups were like mini evolutions. It was raising my entire self to a higher realm of being. Together with the fact that you could choose the direction of growth by means of your status points, level ups were truly an overwhelming and grand authority.

That said, it was still important to have a mana cultivation method. With constant training, not only would the mana's speed of growth get faster upon leveling up, its speed of recovery would also get faster.

My mana cultivation method positioned itself in my status by the name 'Peruta Circuit.' Perhaps because it did not have a rank like low or mid, it was still level 2 even after two months of training.

"All of you, come at me!"

[You used Orc Lord's Warcry! All party members are cleansed of negative status effects. All party members' attack power increases by 50 percent for the duration. All party members become super-armored, unfazed by enemy attacks.]

---

Using Orc Lord's Warcry, which was a perfect skill other than the fact that I could only use it once a day, I charged towards a flock of wraiths. I had no time to waste on guys that didn't drop anything!

"Kiyaaaaaaaaa!"

"Tempest!"

Tempest. It was one of the skills I learned from Peruta. Using a special breathing method combined with a special mana circulation method, it took the artificial current of mana that was generated around my spear and exploded it forward. Everything in its path was torn up by blades of wind. There was truly no skill better to open up a straight path.

The downside was that it used up over 300 mana.

"I see the stairs!"

I also saw the Floor Shop next to it. I once again swung my glaive and killed the wraiths flying toward me. Then, I rushed toward the Floor Shop and was greeted by the same noona I always met.

I had begun to question whether this noona was the same as the ones from all previous floors. Not only did she look the same, she also knew me extremely well.

“Oh, you were quite fast. You broke through the 7th floor in just two days. Others take two months or even half a year.”

“I should be able to keep going at this rate for a while.”

“Is that so? You remained bound to the 5th floor for over 3 years, but it looks like you didn’t spend your time in vain.”

The shop noona made an odd smile as she looked at me.

“Then why don’t you prove your worth?”

“Hm?”

[A quest appeared!]

“... Quest?”

Upon hearing about it, Ellos spoke excited.

[A quest? Amazing!]

“Is it?”

[Of course! I'm on the 21st floor now, but I've never encountered a quest!]

“What’s a quest?”

I of course knew what a quest was. It was something easily found in games. When someone accepted a request from an NPC and fulfilled it, he would receive experience points and rewards. Simply put, a quest was fulfilling a request and earning rewards for it.

But I never imagined that the dungeon would have quests. I couldn't hide my surprise at this revelation, and I contacted Ellos to obtain whatever information I could about it.

[A quest is... a quest. It's like a surprise present. No one knows what triggers it.]

“A surprise present.”

[Yep. In my continent, there is an explorer who conquered the 50th floor of the Third Dungeon. From what I heard, he could only climb so high because of a quest he triggered on the 17th floor. Like I said, no one knows what conditions triggers quests,

but we do know one thing. If you do as the quests say, you can obtain skills or items unobtainable by normal explorers.]

[Through that quest, the explorer I mentioned learned a skill that would become his iconic move. Growing along with it, he climbed all the way to the 50th floor!]

“Wow, so what happened to him?”

[He fell while fighting against the invaders. It was a truly heroic death. It’s a shame. If he was an explorer of the First Dungeon instead of the Third, he could have become much stronger.]

“You mean the reward is greater if the dungeon’s difficulty is greater.”

[Yep. The number in front of dungeons denote how difficult it is.]

According to Ellos, his home continent, Edias, always had magicians, priests who used God’s power, and knights who manifested auras. It was only about 300 years ago that dungeon

explorers began to appear. Ellos called these first ones to become dungeon explorers the ‘Pioneers.’

The Pioneers raised their levels by exploring dungeons, and became the strongest in the continent by equipping items from the dungeons. By the time Followers, ones who obtained the qualifications to enter the dungeon by the Pioneers’ acknowledgement, appeared, invaders began to appear in their continent.

These invaders arrived with large armies, and their goal was to massacre and conquer all residents of the continent. No words got through to them, and the residents of the continent were left with no choice but to fight back.

Against these enemies that used mystical weapons and magic, it was obviously only the dungeon explorers who could face them. This war that began 200 years ago still seemed to be raging on.

After becoming a dungeon explorer, Ellos also obtained a key position in his country. Now that he had climbed above the 20th floor, he was on the front line fighting against the invaders. When I first heard his story, I was shocked. I found it regrettable that all I could do to help him was to cheer him on.

“Does the First Dungeon have less explorers?”

[Yep. A dungeon explorer’s qualities determine which dungeon he gets to go. Not that I’m bragging or anything,

haha.]

“Consider it flattering me then.”

[What? Hahahaha! Anyways, congratulations on getting a quest, friend. I’ll pray for your success.]

“Alright, I’ll talk to you later.”

[Quest – Charge through the Ghosts

Content – Although you dawdled, unable to break through the 6th floor for over 3 years, you were able to somehow break through the 7th floor in two days. The First Dungeon’s Floor Shop owner, Loretta, wishes to test the potential she sees in you.

If you can break through the 9th floor in a day, Loretta might give you a rare item unavailable for purchase.

Time Left Until Quest Ends: 23:46:14]

“Kiyaaaaa!”

“Hm, breaking through the 9th floor in a day... it shouldn't be too hard if I... eh?”

As I read the content of the quest in front of the 8th floor, lightning seemed to strike me as I finally realized something.

“I have to break through two floors in one day!?”

W-What!? I checked the amount of time I had left. ‘Oh no, my precious 14 minutes!’ I hurriedly began charging with my glaive in hand. The wraiths from the 8th floor went after me like ants that had just found a lollipop on the ground.

“Screw off! I don't have time to play around with you guys!”

I had 600 mana left.

‘If I succeed in completing this quest, I swear I'll focus on the Peruta Circuit!’ Making a belated vow of regret, I bravely held up my spear and charged forward like Don Quixote tilting at windmills. The only choice I had left was to rush forward!

[Stupid! I told you to contact me first. Why didn't you for so long!? Don't tell me you're going to stop with just a single message? You stupid Orc!]

It seemed like someone sent me a message, but I was too busy to



pay attention to it.

‘I am one with the spear. My spear is the spear that will pierce the heavens!’

[Y-You, I finally contacted you, don't tell me you're going to ignore me? ... Fine, you Orc. I don't know you anymore! I hope you slip and break your nose!]

“Kiyaaaaa!”

“Huaaaaaaaaa!”

‘Ah, I wonder who can stop this wonderful feeling I'm having! One with the spear, I shall rush forward! My only goal, the staircase!’

[Stupid! Stupid! I hate you!]

[... I don't know you anymore... stupid...]

After about 15 hours, I finally reached the end of 8th floor.

“Haa... haa...”

“Oh, you look tired. You have 9 hours left. Are you sure you can do it?”

“Hu, huhu... O-Of course... Hu...”

Clearing away the annoying windows in front of me, I answered. So she really was the same person! Strange. How was it possible? I stared at her trying to figure it out, but the noona who's straight hair was memorable looked away with reddened cheeks.

“Even if you stare at me so passionately, I won't increase the time.”

“No, that's not it.”

“Compared to when you first arrived, you became much manlier. Even so, you're still 5 years too early. I prefer men who can protect me.”

“No, that's not it either.”

I didn't want to waste any more time talking to her, so I sat down and began eating beef jerky. Then, store noona began another conversation.

Her eyes were shining, unlike last time.



# Chapter 13. The World Becomes A Dungeon

## (6)

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“Did you notice any difference between the wraiths on the 7th floor and 8th floor?”

“Mmm... the 8th floor wraiths were a bit stronger. Their defense seemed to be higher.”

Unlike the wraiths on the 7th floor, the wraiths from the 8th floor didn't die in one hit. But noona didn't seem satisfied with my answer.

“You didn't feel anything else?”

“Anything else? Uh... oh, yeah.”

There seemed to be ones that spit out something from their mouths. They were almost like goblins with their poisonous darts. Because I became temporarily paralyzed when they hit me, they were quite annoying to deal with. Without them, I could have reached the end of the 8th floor a few hours quicker.

“Do you think the 9th floor won't have wraiths like those?”

“What are you trying to say?”

Even though I asked, I knew what she was going to say. Just as I

had expected, the shop noona shoved a strange object in front of my face and shouted.

“Here! This here is Spiritual Shield, something that can block the wraiths’ ectoplasm arrows 100 times! It’s only 5,000 gold! If you buy this, you might be able to break through the 9th floor in under 9 hours!”

“... Did you give me a quest just to sell me things?”

Noona clearly turned her eyes away at my inquiry. Then...

“But customer, you never come to the shop...”

“T-That’s...”

“For over 3 years, no less! Not once! Do you know how much my performance has fallen during that time?”

“P-Performance...”

“Why don’t we help each other, customer? You make so much. It wouldn’t hurt to spend some at the shop, would it?”

“But 5,000 gold is too much.”

Since the exchange rate was 2,100 won, that would mean 10.5

million won. Now that I did the conversion in my mind, I really didn't want to buy it. I couldn't buy such a high price item on a whim...

“Without this, it probably will be impossible to break through the 9th floor in 9 hours. Ah, it's 8 hours, 57 minutes, and 58 seconds now.”

“You're too meticulous with time!”

In the end, I reluctantly bought the Spiritual Shield. It was a sticker, and when I put it on the back of my hand, I felt an instant zap. The sticker then disappeared and the sticker mark seemed to be tattooed onto my hand.

I regretted it. It was a Pokemon sticker.

“Damn it, I have to quickly use these up...!”

If mother or father saw me with a Pokemon tattoo on my hand, they would no doubt look at me with strange eyes. I quickly rushed up to the 9th floor, leaving behind the shop noona cheering me on.

“Next time you buy it, I'll give you a 10 percent discount!”

“Like I will!”

I ran. Although my mana rose to over 1,000 after hitting level 9, I

did not pay any attention to it. I only had 8 hours 55 minutes and 34 seconds left!

“Commence Exploration!” I shouted with a ringing voice.

Wraiths surged out from all directions. Just like shop noona said, there were more wraiths that shot out ectoplasm arrows. Although I doubted whether I needed to spend 10.5 million won to block them, I managed to leave the thought behind, believing that the quest reward would be much better.

[Quest Success] [Seeing you break through the 9th floor in 24 hours, the shop owner regrets making a bet. But a promise is a promise. She will give you a worthy reward.] [You received a system reward. You obtained 1 skill point. You can raise the level of a skill by 1.]

“You really succeeded.”

“Yes.”

“You really... succeeded...”

“Noona, your face.”

Unable to take on shop noona, Loretta’s depressed expression directly, I turned away. I was more concerned with this skill point.

Raising a skill level, wasn't this an amazing reward? It seemed better to save it than to use it now.

Loretta seemed to have found her calm as she grabbed my hand and handed me a translucent circular object.

“Huu, a promise is a promise. Here is your reward.”

[You received Soul Bomb x2.]

“What's this?”

“They're Soul Bombs, customer.”

Although I was thankful she talked to me nicely, her eyes were still dead. I thought about pointing this out, but I just chose to check the information on these Soul Bombs.

[Soul Bomb (Rare)

A magical tool created by a great sage who wields soul magic and Kaloha race's blacksmith, 'Hand of Creation.' When this magical tool is thrown and shock is applied, the 'Spiritual Burst' skill will be used, dealing fatal damage to all existences in soul form. It deals 500 ~ 5,000 damage to all souls in a 20 meter radius.]



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“These are consumables!”

“That’s why I gave you two!”

“So I can only use it twice!”

“Well, customer, would you like to make another bet?”

“It’s breaking through the 10th floor, right? I don’t even need to be told!”

To think she’d make use of her reward and make another bet!  
What a vicious woman!

“But there won’t be a time limit this time.”

“Ho?”

“You can complete it whenever you want.”

“... Let’s hear it.”

“Huhu, I’ve got him.”

“Your inner thoughts are coming out, noona.”

“The bet is simple. You have to defeat the 10th Floor Master, the Wraith Queen, by yourself!”

[A quest appeared!]

“Race Queen?”

I hoped she didn’t ask. Thinking about a racing girl in a miniskirt upon hearing ‘wraith queen’ only proved that I was a man.

“Will you accept the challenge?”

Loretta looked at me provokingly. I smirked and answered.

“I will. Something like that will be no challenge for me.”

[You accepted the quest.]

“Oh, how bold for someone who stayed on the 5th floor for three and a half years.”

“I ended up defeating the Orc Lord alone, so...”

“... Yes?”

“... You didn’t know?”

In an instant, Loretta’s face turned pale and froze. Then, she suddenly grabbed onto my arm. She looked like she was about to cry.

“Let... let me take that back.”

“The die is cast.”

“T-Then let me add a time limit.”

“A girl’s words carry the weight of a thousand gold.”

“There’s no such saying!”

“Visiting the doctor after death.”

“Agh, you evil customer! At least buy more Spiritual Shields!”

“The one I’ve got still has 72 uses left, so I’m good.”

“Ah, really! You’re evil!”

Just like that, I accepted my second quest. Mm, it seemed like I was forgetting something... must just be my imagination. Yep, just my imagination.

The 10th Floor Master, Wraith Queen. It was accompanied by 50 wraiths, and used fear magic, confusion magic, and ectoplasm arrows to torment dungeon explorers facing it. However, it had a clear weakness. It was that its HP was much lower compared to the Orc Lord.

Loretta was also selling items that blocked fear and confusion magic. These items that only blocked the Wraith Queen’s magic for 5 minutes were 5,000 gold a piece. According to Ellos, dungeon explorers who challenged the Wraith Queen suffered under her insatiable desire to devour money.

“I still won’t buy them.”

“Why!? With them, it’s impossible to beat it alone!”

“I’m not trying to beat it alone for now.”

“Ku...”

Priest-type explorers knew spells that could cleanse the fear or confused status effect. Rather than challenging it alone from the beginning, I chose to enter a party and experience a boss raid.

In this chaotic time when mutant life forms were appearing on Earth, being unable to enter the dungeon for a week meant my time stopped flowing. Even if I hunted the mutant life forms, not only would my level not rise, I would risk exposing myself as an ability user. As such, the only place I could train was in the dungeon.

I had no plan of ever being kicked out of the dungeon again.

“Take good care of me. I’m Kang Shin from Earth.”

“Earth? Are you... that Kang Shin?”

“Yep, I’m that Kang Shin.”

“No way, the Crown Prince has advanced to the 10th floor!”

“What? It’s really the Crown Prince?”

“Whoa, the Crown Prince is in our party!”

Amazing. I had just entered a random party, but it seemed everyone knew who I was. I wonder how the rumor spread.

“This is my first time fighting the Wraith Queen. I might get in your way.”

“You’ll be more than enough help just by clearing all the wraiths. The priestesses can take care of the rest.”

“Leave it to us!”

There were three priestesses in this party. Oddly enough, there were no priests. Although the priestesses were beautiful, they were ugly compared to my beautiful Yua. Just as I was thinking this, one of them talked to me.

“Crown Prince-nim, do you perhaps know her highness?”

“... Who?”

I was about to say, ‘Crown Prince is my nickname. By her highness, do you mean Yua?’ her serious eyes stopped me.

“I mean Ehuir Empire’s crown princess, her highness Palludia Gren Ehuir! I heard you partied with her previously!”

“Eh, Palludia? Yeah, I know her, but... crown princess?”

When I told the priestess that this was the first time I’ve been told about it, she gave me a dumbfounded look.

“You mean you couldn’t tell from her graceful and beautiful appearance?”

“Graceful? She was just a noisy brat...”

“What!?”

‘Ah, whoops...’ Just like that, I had to spend the next 5 minutes hearing about Palludia’s beauty. Why did I have to go through such an unreasonable treatment? What part of that flat-chested twin-tail was so beautiful? Of course, I didn’t say anything out loud.

“You understand how beautiful and splendid Palludia-nim is now? She is the rising morning star of our continent, the ever-burning flame of hope, a flower that must not fight against the demon kind!”

“Alright, alright, I understand, so let’s just go hunt the Wraith Queen.”

“By your half hearted response, it look like you didn’t understand in the slightest! I’ll tell you one more time, so wipe your ears clean and listen!”

My ears were very clean, thank you very much. In fact, hearing more about Palludia would only make my ear go... wait. Palludia? Come to think of it, yesterday...

“AAAAAAHHHHHH!”

“Kyaa! You surprised me!”

When I screamed, the shocked priestess fell on the ground. However, I wasn't in a position to pay attention to her.

“Oh no, I ignored Palludia's messages.”

That noisy girl wasn't the type to stay silent after having her messages ignored. With my rising fear, I began to sweat. Now that things had come to this, should I keep ignoring her? No, I couldn't avoid her forever. Eventually, I would meet her again in the dungeon. Plus, ignoring her would be too rude. Although she wasn't likable, she wasn't detestable either...

‘Alright, I'll contact her as soon as the Wraith Queen raid ends.’ Making a vow, I spoke to the party members.

“Let's hurry and do this!”

“CROWN PRINCEEEE!”

... Although I made an enemy in an unexpected way, I chose to ignore it.

Not paying any attention to the burning gaze behind me, I opened the door to what was a haunted house.



# Chapter 14. The World Becomes A Dungeon

## (7)

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“Kiyaaaa!”

“Kyaaak!”

Menacing ghosts turned their attention toward us. I quickly scanned the room to find the Wraith Queen. Just like I had expected, she was looking down at us from a throne in the innermost area of the room. She appeared to be 3 meters tall and took the form of a woman.

“Humans dare to enter my territory? I shall extract your souls and make you suffer for all eternity!”

“We’ll take care of the wraiths first!”

The attack strategy was not too different from the strategy for the Orc Lord. Against all the wraiths flying toward us, I used Tempest and paved open a path.

“Kuaaaaak!”

“Alright, let’s go!”

“... Eh?”

“... Yes?”

Since I spent 300 mana to kill about 30 wraiths, I felt it was justified. However, my party members seemed to disagree. I remember the party leader saying that the Wraith Queen had a skill that summoned wraiths when their numbers got low and that we had to take care of them quickly. What was wrong?

“Is there a problem?”

“What level are you?”

“10. Aren’t we all?”

“Are you really level 10?”

“Yes, I really am.”

It felt a bit weird hearing them repeatedly say [ten](#). When I replied in a displeased tone, the party leader retorted as if he had just heard the most ridiculous thing.

‘Ten’ in Korean sounds similar to the F-word equivalent, although not exactly

“What skill allows a level 10 to kill 30 wraiths of the same level?”

“The high-rank spear technique.”

It was level 2 high-rank spear technique, to be exact. High-rank weapon techniques really were hard to level up.

“H-High rank...”

“This is the power of the Crown Prince...”

“Crown Prince...”

I felt like dying from embarrassment. In the meanwhile, the Wraith Queen was making a summoning gesture.

“More wraiths are coming out! I have a limit to my mana, so I can only use that skill two more times!”

“Ah, everyone, charge! Priestesses, prepare your status effect cleansing spells!”

“Yes!”

With the party leader taking the lead, everyone rushed forward. Although I also ran while taking care of the incoming wraiths, the Wraith Queen re-summoned ten wraiths in one go. The summoned wraiths flew toward us the moment they were summoned, and the Wraith Queen went back to her summoning gesture.

“She’s one annoying ghost for sure. When the number of wraiths fall below twenty, she starts summoning more!”

“I’ll take care of the wraiths so you can focus on dealing damage!”

“Got it! Everyone, use auras!”

A bluish aura wrapped around the party leader’s sword. As I struck down the wraiths, the party leader and five other people all used their swords, blades, and spears to attack the Wraith Queen. Even as she screamed out in pain, the Wraith Queen didn’t stop summoning wraiths.

“Haaap!”

I let out a spirited shout and activated Tempest to sweep the wraiths once more. Mana surged from my body as it traveled from the heart, ran down the arm, and wrapped around my spear. It formed a spiral current as I thrust it forward!

BOOM!

“Kiyaaaaa!”

“Syaaaaa!”

A majority of the leftover wraiths were swept away by the

Tempest. The Wraith Queen stopped her summoning and let out a rageful scream.

“KIYAAAAA!”

[Wraith Queen used Vengeful Spirit's Wail! All party members fall under a state of confusion! All party members fall under a state of fear!]

[You attempt to resist. With 22 charm and 11 luck, resistance chance is 28 percent... Resist failed! You fall under confusion and fear!]

What? What just happened? Suddenly, I couldn't balance myself properly. My head was spinning and I wanted to fall down. I didn't understand why I was here. I just wanted to lie and rest.

When I raised my head, I was surrounded by several Palludias. Huk! No way, Palludia!

“You Orc!”

“Bastard Orc!”

“You dare ignore me?”

“You're just an Orc!”

“I’ll kill you!”

“Sorry! I didn’t meant to ignore you!”

“Like I care!”

“Die!”

“Uwaaaak!”

All the Palludias suddenly jumped at me. I’ll die, I’ll die right here! At that moment...

“Save those who fell under darkness! Purify!”

[You have been cleansed of status effects.]

“Uwak, Palludia, I’m sor... Eh?”

When I snapped out of it, all the Palludias disappeared and turned into wraiths. No, they couldn’t have been Palludia in the first place. They were wraiths from the very beginning. Did I mistake them for Palludia in the confused state? Why was I so afraid of her in the first place!?

“Leader!”

One of the priestess suddenly shouted. When I hurriedly turned my head, I saw the Wraith Queen endlessly shooting out ectoplasm arrows at the party leader. He seemed to not have any Spiritual Shield or have run out as he turned pale and soon fell.

“Damn, the leader died!”

“The Wraith Queen is summoning again!”

“Kuk, at this rate...”

The next thing I knew, the raid was about to end as a failure. Didn’t I have an item for this exact situation? I hurriedly took out a Soul Bomb from my inventory and threw it at the Wraith Queen. The moment the bomb made contact and exploded, a boom sounded out and the Wraith Queen staggered.

Kwang!

[Spiritual Burst activated! Wraith Queen received 1,496 damage.]

[Wraith received 700 damage.]

[Wraith received 4,700 damage.]

‘Damn it, it could deal up to 5,000 damage and it only did 1,500!?’ Although I was disappointed by the Soul Bomb’s power, it managed to stop her. The two wraiths standing near her also died in the blast. Now was the time to turn the tide! I decided to use the skill I kept hidden.

“EVERYONE, CHAAAARGE!”

[You used Orc Lord’s Warcry! All party members are cleansed of negative status effects. All party members’ attack power increases by 50 percent for the duration. All party members become super-armored, unfazed by enemy attacks.]

“W-What’s this?”

“Isn’t this the Orc Lord’s skill? Who used it?”

“No way, it’s the Crown Prince!”

“Stop babbling and attack!”

Feeling my body glow under the effect of super-armor, I rushed toward the Wraith Queen. When I thrust my spear in, I could feel a definite response. As expected of a 50 percent attack power



increase!

“Kiyaaaak!”

“Die!”

‘I’m going to have to work on my habit of shouting out in fights.’ Even as I scolded myself internally, on the outside, I was acting wild like a boar that had just been hit. The party members seemed to understand that questions were for later as they followed my lead and attacked the Wraith Queen.

Attacks from the entire party! Not to mention, they were strengthened by 50 percent! The Wraith Queen could not finish her summoning gesture and stumbled down. When a beautiful woman fell, it would be a man’s instinct to help her rise. Unfortunately, none of the men here had the desire to escort the Wraith Queen.

“Kiyaaaaak!”

[Wraith Queen uses Vengeful Spirit’s Wail. Super-armor state ignores status effect.]

‘Wow! I didn’t know super-armor had such an effect.’

In truth, because the super-armor was such an unusual state, I

did not fully know all of its uses. However, I did know that this was the best opportunity to finish off the Wraith Queen.

I checked the amount of mana I had left.

‘Still about 300. What should I do? Save it? No, if I saved it and Orc Lord’s Warcry ended, it would be terrible.’ I did not doubt I would succeed, but I did not want to unnecessarily send other party members on week-long vacations.

“Kuk, we’re being pushed back!”

“This Wraith Queen! Even her physical attacks are strong!”

“Sinoa’s about to die! Heal her!”

“Kiyaaaa! Let the vengeful spirits burn you alive, humans!!”

In the end, I came to a decision. Brushing aside the wraiths that were nearing me with a single swing, I pulled my spear back slightly. This was not a spear technique I learned from Peruta, but a Kang family spear technique I learned from father.

It focused the entire body’s power into the spear tip and penetrated the enemy. By pouring all of one’s concentration into the spear tip, it created a single blow that surpassed the limit of humans.

With it, I wrapped the spiral current of mana used in Tempest. The spear tip began to tremble, and I held it back with my willpower alone. For a move that poured everything into a single attack, not a shred of hesitation or wavering could be allowed.

“Eh, Crown Prince is doing something.”

“Someone hold down the Wraith Queen! She’s trying to run out!”

“Crown Prince, hurry!”

I did not even have the energy to reply. Damn, controlling mana and controlling the entire body’s strength. Doing these two things at once gave me a splitting headache. Was it really impossible to do both of these at once? ... No, wait. Wasn’t mana part of my strength? Why was I trying to stick to the shape of Tempest? It was an attack focused on a single point. Why couldn’t I just focus my mana with it?

The moment I realized it, the current of mana wrapping around the spear disappeared. Instead, my mana began to flow from my body to the spear tip. The stream of pure white light flowing and gather at the spear tip made it look like I was gathering energy for an energy blast.

But I had to end it quick. I could feel my mana draining. The only thing to do was to draw my breath and thrust out. In this tranquil state, I stared fixedly at the Wraith Queen’s chest, the target of my attack.

“N-No way... That light is...”

“Hero? I see, Crown Prince was his world’s Hero. I thought he was overly strong...”

No words entered my ears. The only important thing to me right now was this attack. I devoted my entire focus on this attack.

The attack timing came in a surprise. It was the moment right before the Wraith Queen tried to use another Vengeful Spirit Wail and also the moment right before Orc Lord’s Warcry ended.

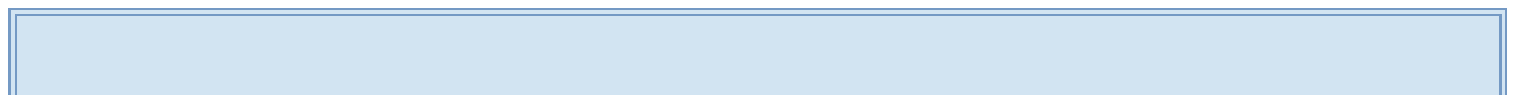
I thrust out with my spear.

Puuuk.

Surprisingly, a soft sensation like sticking a fork through cake flowed through me. I smiled. I knew this attack was a success. There was no chance that it failed.

“KIYAAAAAA!”

The Wraith Queen let out a bloodcurdling scream, slowly turning transparent. At the same time, in front of us eight members (someone else seemed to have died without me noticing), a large window appeared.



[You became level 11. You obtained the qualification to enter the 11th floor.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[You obtained 3,000 gold. It is distributed evenly amongst party members. You received 375 gold.]

[Rewards will be distributed in order of contribution.]

[Kang Shin-nim's contribution is the highest. Choose your reward.]

“Kyaa, we did it!”

“We won, we won!”

“All hail Crown Prince!”

“Crown Prince is the best!”

After standing blankly for a while, everyone threw themselves onto me. Because most of them were women, I almost lost my sense of reasoning from their sweet scent and soft touch.

“Everyone, let go of Crown Prince. He has to choose a reward

before we do.”

“Ah, right. Sorry, Crown Prince.”

“Sorry, Crown Prince, but you looked so cool back there!”

“That aside, why do you all keep calling me Crown Prince...?”

Expressing discontent at my nickname that seemed have become fixed, I checked the reward list.

- [1. Wraith Queen’s Headdress
2. Middle Potion
3. Mana Potion
4. Soul Tempering Elixir
5. Rescue Nut
6. Animate Dead Magic Book
7. Wraith Queen’s Ghost Shoes
8. Emergency Medical Kit]

...Hu, huhu, huhuhu.

“Hiik, Crown Prince is laughing.”

“Hm? What could have come out?”

“Ah, I’m 3rd in contributions. I hope there are at least 3 Wraith Queen drops...!”

‘Huhu, don’t worry, you’ll obtain what you want. Of course, I will too!’ Would I choose anything else at this point? Without a shred of hesitation, I chose number 4, the Soul Tempering Elixir.

#### [Soul Tempering Elixir (Rare)]

All souls become dirty and mixed with impurities as they live their lives. When the body experiences sudden growth, the soul often is unable to adapt to the new body and even degrade. The Soul Tempering Elixir purifies the soul and strengthens it to fit the body. A tempered soul not only affects the body positively, but it also positively affects one’s mana.

Note, when someone whose soul has already been tempered to the max or when someone who has both weak soul and body consumes this elixir, it may deal permanent damage or even kill in the worst case scenario.]

As I expected! When I swallowed the Soul Tempering Pill without hesitation, it felt like hot water was pouring inside me. However, I endured it with my willpower. When the feeling had disappeared, a message I had been expecting appeared.

[You tempered your soul. As a result, your magic and charm increases by 1.]

‘Eh, why did charm go up?’ Although this was something I hadn’t expected, since it was a good thing, I decided not to put much thought into it.

“Wow! There are two Wraith Queen items left!”

“This raid was amazing on so many levels!”

“Kya, a magic book!”

““Crown Prince! Crown Prince!””

Can you guys stop chanting Crown Prince!? Please, I beg you!



# Chapter 15. Dungeon Explorers Can Awaken Too? (1)

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What did I do after that? I, of course, went straight to the 11th floor. My situation was different than before. Three years ago, I had to remain on the 5th floor hunting the Orc Lord because I couldn't advance through the 6th floor. Now, I could do things a little smarter.

Dungeon explorers became unable to challenge Floor Masters once they defeated the next one. In other words, as long as they did not defeat the next Floor Master, they could always go back and challenge the previous Floor Master. In short, before I defeat the 15th Floor Master, I could always re-challenge the Wraith Queen.

Between level 11 and level 15, there was at least a 500 mana difference. There was no need to take the hard path when the easy one was so readily available. As such, I decided to explore the 11th floor. When Loretta saw me heading up from the 10th floor, she trembled and said, "T-That method is... unfair."

"Unfair?"

"What I wanted was for customer to challenge the boss at level 10..."

"But you didn't say that yesterday."

"..."

“Haa. I understand, noona. I agree that leveling up to level 15 and challenging the Wraith Queen is slightly unfair.”

“Customer! Then...”

“But the world of competition is cruel.”

Loretta made a sulking expression. Because it was too cute, I couldn't help but laugh.

“Hahahaha! Even so, as far as I know, defeating the Wraith Queen alone should be hard even at level 15.”

“Of course, it is. I have only seen it happen twice.”

“Hm, so there is precedent.”

“Of course. If you think you will be the first in everything you do, you are mistaken. Though, you are the first in the past 200 years...”

“What was that at the end?”

“No, it's nothing. Well, customer, it looks like you discovered a loophole in my quest. Then, try your best.”

“I sense great malicious intent in what you said...”

“What was that? Ah yes, the item you need for the 11th floor is this! The Rat Trap! This great item is now selling for a mere 100 gold.”

“I didn’t ask!”

I had more or less expected it when Loretta talked about Rat Traps, but the monsters on the 11th floor were the infamous ratmen. You could simply think of them as 1 meter tall rats walking around on their hind legs. They had long, sharp tails that swung around like whips and were difficult to attack due to their quick movements.

Moreover, they did not travel alone. When you spotted one, there would undoubtedly be five more behind it. Their reproductive capabilities were like that of cockroaches. That said, I already had experience stabbing flying cockroaches to death. It wasn’t so hard for me to follow some rats’ movements.

“Ugh, I get goosebumps every time I see them!”

“Kiaak! Human kill rat!”

“That’s right, today will be an extermination day!”

Fighting against ratmen who always ambushed in groups, my battle sense grew significantly. As I always stayed alert, predicting

where they would come from next, I began to acquire the ability to grasp my surroundings. Because I was not on a timer this time, I spent about a week to slowly grow my battle sense.

All the ratmen on 12th and 13th floor would also be stronger, I knew their movements couldn't be too different. As such, I decided to grasp all their movement patterns on the 11th floor. This took an additional week.

“Huhu, it's not so easy anymore, is it?”

After seeing me for the first time in two weeks, Loretta asked with a satisfied expression. It seemed she thought I wanted to give up on the Wraith Queen quest, so I smirked and answered her.

“Hey, do you want to make an additional bet?”

“... No, I don't,” said Loretta making a triangle mouth. I couldn't help but laugh again.

“You shouldn't make fun of this noona!”

“You can't be that much older than me.”

“You'd be surprised. I'm much older than you could ever imagine!”

“Really? Can I still call you noona?”

“Hmph, only a pervert like customer would call a strange shop owner noona.”

“I’m looking forward to continue working with you, Loretta noona.”

“Kuu...”

In truth, I had no experience interacting with women. Besides my angelic younger sister Yua, there was no one of the opposite sex that I talked to regularly. Although I had quite a few close female friends when I was in elementary school, things changed when my muscles began to grow.

As a result, Loretta was the first girl outside of my family that I talked with for such a long time. I couldn’t help but feel that I was pitiful. How did things come to this...?

“Whew, I know I’m beautiful, but I’ll be troubled if you approach me.”

“No, I’m not really interested as a man.”

When I told her flat out, Loretta smacked me.

“How rude! Apologize! Apologize and buy this Rat Trap!”

“What does the Rat Trap have to do with this?”

“Come on, hurry up!”

“Sigh. Then I’ll buy five for now.”

“That will be 500 gold, customer. Since you didn’t apologize, you should buy five more.”

“Sorry, five is fine.”

Just like always, my conversation with Loretta ended with gold. Seeing her undying professionalism, I pledged to never judge a woman by her looks.

With five Rat Traps in hand, I walked up to the 12th floor. As I did, I thought, ‘I seem to be forgetting about something... well, whatever. It can’t be anything important. Yep.’

One month from then, on the 14th floor, I was running from a hailstorm of lightning.

“Come on, what kind of rats shoots out lightning!?”

“Pika... pika pika!”

“Shut it, you fakes!”

‘Pika my ass!’ I silently complained as I ran away from the five-for-one Electric Ratmen.

I had wondered why the 13th Floor Shop was selling Lightning Resistant Robes. Because it cost 10,000 gold, I left without turning back, but now I was regretting it.

“Pika!!”

“Agh, shut up! Tempest!”

My Orc Lord’s Glaive trembled and shot out a gale in a straight line. Tempest tore apart the ratmen’s lightning along with their bodies.

“Pikaaaaaaa!”

“Just die already!”

I shuddered and stopped in place. Gasping for breath, I checked and saw that I had about half my mana left. Adjusting my breath calmly, I initiated Peruta Circuit. Of course, even as I circulated mana, I didn’t forget to use my ears.

Ratmen were fundamentally different than orcs and wraiths. They knew all too well exactly when and how to annoy explorers. They popped up from the most unexpected places at the most

unexpected time. They were driving me crazy.

If I wanted to rest, I had to throw down a few Rat Traps in the area. I was only using the Peruta Circuit because I had some strength left.

KaTalk!

At that moment, my phone buzzed. What was that? You didn't think phones worked in the dungeon? Nope, they worked perfectly fine. How else would I communicate with the outside? I needed to run to Yua if she ever needed me!

I picked up my phone. It was a message from father.

[I awakened.]

“.... What?”

I couldn't help but speak my thoughts out loud. He uh... what? Awakened?

“ ... ”

I calmly thought about what he meant. Because I had been too focused in fighting the ratmen, I couldn't think critically.



‘I see...’ I knew what it meant when someone ‘awakened’.

KaTalk!

[You might find it hard to believe, so come see it for yourself.]

“Father awakened!?”

That meant father had become an ability user!

I quickly left the dungeon. As long as I wasn’t in battle, I could exit the dungeon at any time through my phone. The moment I came out, I saw father waiting for me on the couch.

“Father, you became an ability user?”

“Yes. I didn’t think it was possible. You jealous?”

“What ability is it?”

“Mm, I’ll show you. Here.”

Father’s eyes turned serious. He pulled his fist back, then pushed it forward. Suddenly, I felt like his fist was flying toward me. He

had clearly not moved his fist, but I trusted in my instincts honed by experience and quickly ducked. Surprisingly, something passed over my head in an instant and hit the wall, leaving a crack.

“A shockwave.”

“Yep.”

“Freaking awesome.”

“Freaking awesome indeed.”

Father nodded his head in agreement. He was already strong, but to think he would obtain a shockwave ability! I was dying from jealousy. I was recently thinking that I had gotten stronger, but just like this, the scale had been flipped.

“How did you awaken, father?”

“You see, I saw a dream.”

“A dream? What dream?”

“Dungeons.”

“... Dungeons?”

“Countless dungeons appeared on Earth. They were not like the First Dungeon we are familiar with. From them, countless monsters began pouring out, and us humans did our best to stop them. Some had swords clad in auras, some shot out flames from their hands, and some used telekinetic power. Various abilities were being used to stop the monsters’ onslaught.”

“I was among them. I held a spear in my hands and was beating down monsters one by one. Then, I used shockwaves to kill a knight wearing strange armor. When I woke up, I could use shockwaves just like in my dream.”

No ability users had revealed how they had obtained their abilities. As such, I had no way of knowing whether father’s method was normal. Assuming that everyone obtained their abilities in the same way, were these precognitive dreams or triggers for obtaining abilities? Perhaps they were both true.

Regardless, I was still extremely jealous.

“Huhu, son, guess what? In the process, I even gained some mana. Jealous?”

“Eh? Then what about the Orc Lord?”

“... cough.”

“Okay, never mind.”

It seemed repeatedly hunting the Orc Lord was hard even for father. To maintain father’s honor, I decided not to ask about it.

Just like that, father became an ability user. He quit the Orc Lord raid and advanced to the next floor.

Two months after Two Moon, two weeks after father had awakened, I reached the 15th floor.

[You became level 15. You have obtained the qualifications to challenge the Floor Master.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[Name: Kang Shin Race: Human Sex: Male

Class: None Title: Orc Lord Slayer Rank: Bronze 4

Level: 15

HP – 4,540/4,540 MP – 1,840/1,840

Strength – 45(+8) Dexterity – 42(+1) Constitution – 51(+6)

Intelligence – 20(+1) Magic – 28(+1) Charm – 17(+1) Luck – 10(+1)

Skill – Low-rank Martial Arts (Master), Low-rank Spear Technique (Master), Mid-rank Spear Technique (Master), High-rank Spear Technique (Lv 3), Peruta Circuit (Lv 2), Deific Manifestation]

My current self could easily handle three of my level 10 selves. I felt confident that I could even deal with the 15th Floor Master. Of course, I didn't have the leisure to play around with Dark Ratman. I immediately turned back. 14th Floor Shop's Loretta was already glaring at me.

“Customer, you really went all the way to level 15. That is not adult-like.”

“What do you mean, this is exactly what an adult would do.”

“Meanie...!”

“Take good care of me. After all, we are in a relationship of mutual dependence.”

I taunted her with a wink, and as expected, Loretta became angry.

“I won’t give you any discounts, customer!”

“Yeah, yeah. You’re very cute.”

“Kuaaa! This is the first time a human called me cute! How humiliating!”

“Then see you later!”

“Go die!”

I rushed down to the 10th floor. Of course, climbing down posed no problem whatsoever. This was where it began!

‘The Wraith Queen grind starts now! I swear, I’ll hunt one of you every day!’

## Chapter 16. Dungeon Explorers Can Awaken Too? (2)

---

I first decided to hunt the Wraith Queen with 10 party members. If I succeeded without anyone dying, I would reduce the number to nine, then eight, and so on until I could defeat it alone.

“Our party leader’s level 15.”

“Why did he come back to the 10th floor?”

“There are people like them from time to time. You know, the equipment set the boss drops. They want to collect them.”

“Eh, it’s impossible to collect them all though.”

“Shh, just leave him be.”

Of course, I planned to do that as well. Well, perhaps it wasn’t really a plan, since I knew they would naturally fall into my hands as I collected Soul Tempering Elixirs. Without answering the party members’ questions, I opened the door where the Wraith Queen was waiting.

“Kiyaaaaa!”

“Human, live humans!”

“Kiyaaaa!”

“Everyone go in! Two tankers hold her off! Damage dealers, get in position! Tempest!”

As I gave out orders, I blew away the group of wraiths flying toward us with Tempest. With half of the wraiths suddenly gone, the remaining wraiths panicked and flew around in circles. At the same time, the Wraith Queen started her summoning gesture. Seeing my party members’ dumbfounded expressions, I smirked and commanded, “The Wraith Queen is in her summoning gesture! Everyone attack!”

After two months, I successfully changed from the Crown Prince of 5F to the Crown Prince of 10F.

“Crown Prince-nim!”

“No way, this is Crown Prince-nim’s party!”

“Crown Prince-nim, how many are you accepting into your party today?”

Three blonde beauties teleported in front of me. Because I had partied with all kinds of people from other worlds, I was no longer fazed by average people like them.



Kang Shin, you grew up! To think a day would come where you could call such eye-catching beauties average.

“It will be just us four.”

“... But you didn’t ask what our classes were yet.”

“One of you is a healer, right?”

“Right. How did you know?”

“I’ve found that parties of three or more always have a healer in them.”

I gave a quick reply and checked my equipment. I had consumed 53 Soul Tempering Elixirs so far, and had raised my magic and charm stats by 9 each. The Muscle, Bone, and Skin Compressing Elixirs all stopped having any effect after raising 10 of their respective stats, so I safely assumed it would be the same for the Soul Tempering Elixir. In other words, once I raised my magic and charm by one more stat point, I would be done with Soul Tempering Elixirs.

On the seven times when the Soul Tempering Pill did not drop, I picked up the Wraith Queen equipment for six of them and a Middle Potion for one. I now possessed Wraith Queen’s Headdress, Wraith Queen’s Black Jacket, Wraith Queen’s White Pants, Wraith Queen’s Silk Gloves, Wraith Queen’s Ghost Shoes, and Wraith Queen’s Leather Whip.

The Wraith Queen's equipment were made of lightweight fabric, but because I didn't know what skill they came with, I decided to collect them all. That said, I couldn't get myself to like the Wraith Queen's weapon, a whip.

"The grind is almost over."

"Eh? Over? You're leaving the 10th floor?"

"Ah, I'll still be around for a little while, but I'll eventually have to go to the 15th floor."

"Wow, as expected of Crown Prince."

"So cool..."

"Alright then, let's head inside."

The Wraith Queen was much easier to hunt than the Orc Lord. At least, I thought so. The reason was simple. The minions could all be blown away in one hit, and the ectoplasm arrows the boss shot out crazily could be blocked easily with Spiritual Shields. Most importantly, the Wraith Queen's special skill, which drove countless dungeon explorers to despair, could be blocked by my Orc Lord's Warcry.

I simply had to use my skills properly and beat on the Wraith

Queen. In the past, when the Orc Lord used Warcry, I felt like I was barely hanging on at the edge of death. In contrast, the Wraith Queen fights had become so easy that I even yawned in the middle.

In truth, I already had full confidence to defeat the Wraith Queen by myself. The only reason I had not done so was that I was still looking for more Soul Tempering Elixirs.

Most important was the fact that I was level 15. Setting aside the fact that I was strengthened by Muscle, Bone, and Skin Compressing Elixirs, there was a huge difference in challenging the first Floor Master at level 5 versus challenging the second Floor Master at level 15. Additionally, I had grown exceedingly used to boss fights from over 3 years of grinding the Orc Lord Floor Master.

The only reason I needed a healer in the party was to ensure other party members would survive. Among dungeon explorers, there were some who stayed on the same floor for several years due to their lack of ability. While I was at it, I wanted to help them safely advance to the next floor.

In RPGs, you gained experience points and leveled up whenever you killed monsters. However, it wasn't so easy in the dungeon. To level up, you had to prove your qualifications by conquering dungeon floors or by defeating floor masters.

You did not get stronger by leveling up. Proving your strength was what allowed you to level up. As such, the strong only got stronger and the weak remained weak.

In the beginning, I was last out of some 140,000 dungeon explorers. Now, I was in the top 100,000. In other words, there were 40,000 people who could not advance past the 15th floor. Of course, this number included people in Second, Third, and Fourth Dungeons. That said, as I was in the First Dungeon, it was safe to assume none of these 40,000 people were stronger than me.

Of the 5 dungeon explorers on Earth, I was now ranked 3rd. Father was still lower leveled than me, and there seemed to be someone else at a lower level. Although I was curious who the 1st ranked dungeon explorer was, because I couldn't do anything about it, I decided not to concern myself with them for now.

Why was I talking about this? To prove my point that this dungeon placed great emphasis on strength.

Having defeated the Wraith Queen in under 10 minutes, the three blonde beauties had entirely different expressions.

“Crown Prince-nim... you really are incredibly strong.”

“Gulp... Um, Crown Prince-nim.”

“Yes?”

As I was about to look through the reward list, my head turned toward the three beauties.

“Starting from the 11th floor, you know you can party with people from other continents, right? ... Would you like to continue partying with us?”

“That’s right, Crown Prince-nim. I don’t usually say this, but if it’s you, I would be happy to...”

Temptation like this was something I had not received on the 5th Floor Master fights. It was likely because they had not yet learned the dungeon’s charm or the importance of having a strong party member. Starting from the 11th floor, however, it became possible to party with people from other continents. It was natural that people would want to recruit strong people into their parties.

Climbing the dungeon made one stronger. Borrowing others’ strengths to do so wouldn’t change that fact.

In truth, it was incredibly foolish. If people focused solely on leveling up, they would undoubtedly neglect to improve their skills. In the end, they would have no choice but to bow down somewhere in the dungeon.

However, these women weren’t thinking about such things as they offered me tempting looks. One even used the excuse of fixing my clothes to whisper, ‘I wouldn’t mind offering you my body if you entered our party.’

It wasn’t the first time this happened. Even parties that were complete with five people offered to kick someone out to recruit me. My response was always the same.

“Sorry, but I want to test just how far I can go by myself.”

“Ah, Crown Prince-nim.”

“Then, I’m off. I hope you can find what you’re looking for in the dungeon.”

Confirming the Soul Tempering Elixir in the reward list, I quickly grabbed it and disbanded the party. When I exited the boss room and closed the door, it began to wane and disappear. Those three likely went back to the dungeon they came from. I found Loretta staring blankly at me, and returned a smile.

“It’s good to see you again.”

“Yes. You haven’t given up on the quest yet?”

“Haha, you see... Gulp...”

Unable to think of what to say at the sulking Loretta, I laughed and swallowed the Soul Tempering Elixir. Then...

[Your soul is tempered to pure white. Your magic and charm stats increased by 1. A perfectly tempered soul strongly affects the body, making it easier to control mana and making it look more charming to others. Your affinity to all souls has

increased. Consuming more Soul Tempering Elixirs will likely have no effect.]

[The duration for Deific Manifestation skill increased. The skill's cooldown time decreased by one day.]

“... Haha.”

The moment I saw the message, I laughed. I couldn't help it. I never imagined there would be an additional effect. At Loretta who was looking at me like I was crazy, I explained, “Loretta noona, I'll clear your quest tomorrow.”

“Eh? I thought you were putting it off because you weren't confident. Wait, hold on, the thing you just swallowed. It was a Soul Tempering Elixir, right?”

“Yes.”

“... I'm asking just in case, how many Soul Tempering Elixirs did you consume?”

“54. That one was the last one.”

“...”

Loretta noona turned into stone. Because she didn't respond even

when waved my hand right in front of her, I lightly pinched her cheeks. Only then did she finally regain consciousness.

“Ow, what are you doing!?”

“Nothing, I thought you were frozen.”

“Of course not! I just spaced out from surprise!”

“Is it that surprising?”

“I didn’t think anyone could consume so many Soul Tempering Elixirs. Even the ones who were lucky enough to obtain Soul Tempering Elixirs stopped after one... Wait.”

Thinking just maybe, Loretta asked, “Did you also consume Muscle Compressing Elixirs?”

“And Bone and Skin Compressing Elixirs.”

“Uwah, I was wondering how someone so big could become so slim... Plus, this is the first time I’ve heard of Skin Compressing Elixirs.”

“So there are things even noona doesn’t know.”

“I’m usually only at the Floor Shops. If my customers don’t sell



me the boss drops, I have no way of knowing the Floor Masters' rewards."

"The people who obtained Skin Compressing Elixirs must have consumed it for themselves. Just like me."

"Yes, yes, you're amazing, customer. Ehew, I picked the wrong person to make bets with. So that's why you didn't die a single time in these two months."

She pouted and complained, but soon made an expression of relief.

"Well, it might better this way. Huhu, try your best, customer. I, Loretta, will watch just how far you can go."

Her words, 'try your best,' had a different nuance than the last time she said it. At her heartfelt support, a smile appeared on my face. However, that was that and this was this.

"Don't just watch, continue helping me."

"I am a shop owner. My role is to sell you items objectively and fairly. I will be sure to sell you the right items at the right time, so be satisfied with that."

"Tsk, you suddenly became cold. You were cuter when you were angry."

“C-Cute...!”

Loretta’s face suddenly turned red. Sensing danger, I quickly opened my phone to leave the dungeon, but was a step too late.

“Stop, you rude customer!”

“See you tomorrow!”

I, of course, waved my hands at her and turned to leave. I could only challenge the Wraith Queen once a day. In my spare time, I trained my spearmanship, practiced my mana cultivation method, read books, or helped mother with chores.

‘Alright, let’s go practice my Peruta Circuit!’

“Waaaaait!”

## Chapter 17. Dungeon Explorers Can Awaken Too? (3)

---

Four and a half months after Two Moon, the invading monsters had been mostly killed or chased out of cities. At the same time, repair on the areas ravaged by monsters was fully under way.

With Guardian and Freedom Wing's increased activities, the world that seemed to be on the way to ruin turned back. It was now a time of transition.

Although school had not yet resumed, there were rumors that colleges would reopen around fall term and have their opening ceremonies. It was likely that high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools would open around the same time.

“Oppa, you’re really strong.”

“I am.”

Yua and I were sitting side by side on the couch, watching TV. If there was something that I deemed the strangest while I was watching TV at a young age, it was seeing my family sitting side by side on our couch.

We couldn’t fit even on a 4-person couch!

Although mother and Yua were incredibly slim, father was tall

and muscular and I looked like an orc. It was physically impossible to sit on the couch with other people.

But it was different now. We could lean on each other's shoulders and watch TV like a loving brother and sister. It was God's blessings.

“Oppa, aren't I heavy?”

“You're light like a feather. Don't ever go on a diet, Yua. You'll shrivel up and die.”

“Come on, I'm not that skinny.”

Yua laughed bashfully. In truth, Yua was a pitiful child. At the age where she should have been spoiled by her older brother, he was too busy sweating and swinging his spear, talking about going to the dungeon. She could only act spoiled in front of mother.

Even so, mother had a tendency to not spoil us, so Yua grew up to be calmer and more adult-like than her age.

I couldn't help but feel guilty. I wanted to make it right. Yua was hesitant at first, but she seemed to have gotten used to it as she now often acted spoiled around me.

[Here is a footage from Korea's only SS-rank ability user, the Goddess of Magma Ye Hwaya, hunting the S-rank monster Wyvern.]

[She is the pride and joy of the Republic of Korea.]

On the TV screen was a woman who looked to be in her early 20's burning up a Wyvern, which resembled a 10 meter long dragon. Perhaps because of her awakening, not only her hair that reached her waist, but also her eyes, were dyed in flame-red. The burning Wyvern looked to be in excruciating pain. 'If that flame touched me, I'd be burnt up in an instant,' I thought.

The world really was unfair. I started off as level 1 and had to work for years to become strong, but others got lucky and awoke to SS-rank, easily defeating such terrifying monsters.

Then again, there were people who awoke to weak abilities and could only stay in E or D-rank their entire lives. Similarly, as long as I continued to climb the dungeon, I surely could get stronger than her. I was given a possibility greater than instantaneous strength.

And below the ability users were ordinary people. Too many died in situations where they could have survived had they awoken to even the weakest ability. There were even more people refused to step outside their houses because they had not awakened.

I learned spearmanship from a young age, but there were plenty of other people who learned martial arts but could not become dungeon explorers. Luck was the sole factor in determining who became ability users and who was eaten by monsters.

In that case, did I have the right to look down on those weaker than me? Did these ability users on TV have the right to be looked up by so many people?

Even with my 20 intelligence stat, I could not come up with answers to questions like these. Suddenly, my thigh itched.

“Ow! Uuu...”

For some reason, Yua looked teary and in pain. Blowing on her thumb and index finger that had turned red, she looked extremely adorable.

“It looked soft, so I pinched it, but it’s way too hard.”

“Ah, sorry, Yua. Are you hurt? Um, let’s see... a potion...”

“It’s fine, oppa. You kept staring at the woman on TV, so I...”

“Mm? No, Yua, oppa was just thinking about something.”

“You weren’t looking at her because she was pretty?”

At her words, I looked at Korea’s only SS-rank ability user, Ye Hwaya smiling after she defeated the Wyvern.

She was indeed beautiful. I didn’t know how much the

awakening had affected her, but she was tall and slim, had snow-white skin and a well-defined facial structure. Even as her hair fluttered in the wind, she did not flinch and instead looked forward with her flame-red eyes.

Above all, she had an amazing chest. That was a D! It was at least a D! How shameful. That was an insult to D-rank ability users. No, perhaps they were E. No, F! Unacceptable, an SS-rank with Fs!

“... Oppa?”

“Cough, no, Yua. You’re the prettiest in the whole world.”

“Really? Ehehe.”

Of course, I really thought Yua was the prettiest in the world. Although that Ye Hwaya definitely had a superior figure...

I patted Yua’s head and buried the thought deep inside my mind. Otherwise, my hard-acquired position as her oppa could get shattered.

Then, the day of Wraith Queen solo arrived. After spending some time debating whether to contact Ellos or not, I decided against it. I would do so after I succeeded. And Palludia too... Palludia.

“No!”

I forgot again! I felt a chill running down my back. I was screwed, definitely screwed! What could I do? That was no chance she wouldn't get angry. I was certain. If I talked to her, things would get annoying, extremely so.

Hm.

Should I just ignore her? I could pretend she never existed.

It felt like an outstanding solution. However, I knew I shouldn't. Although Palludia was sharp-tongued and rude, she had messaged me in concern. Plus, after we separated three and a half years ago, I was the one who did not contact her and ignored her messages!

“Alright, I'll contact her when the raid ends. This time, I won't forget.”

I vowed to myself and clenched my fists. Then, I opened the door to where the Wraith Queen was waiting.

“Kiyaaaaa!”

“Tempest!”

The moment I entered the room, I used Tempest. Having raised my magic with Soul Tempering Elixirs and Peruta Circuit, I now had over 2,200 MP. If my MP was low, I could simply drink a Mana Potion. Although Mana Potions were extremely expensive at the Floor Shop, I had over 100 lowest-grade Mana Potions, which



restored 100 MP each. Not considering the one minute cooldown time for potions, I had over 10,000 spare mana.

“Gulp, gulp. Again! Tempest!”

“Kiyaaaaa!”

Every time I thrust forward with my spear, dozens of wraiths screamed and died. The flustered Wraith Queen quickly began to summon more wraiths. It was exactly what I hoped would happen.

“Let’s go! ... Ha!”

I immediately rushed toward the Wraith Queen. Wraiths that had survived my attack flew toward me, but I sent them flying back with a simple swing of my spear. Although the Wraith Queen summoned 20 wraiths at a time, it required her to chant for a long time. It was more than enough time for me to arrive in front of her and deal a blow. One that concentrated my body’s entire mana and strength!

Having practiced this move against the Wraith Queen for two months, I could now perform it pretty easily. Because other people kept saying hero this hero that, I came to call it ‘Heroic Strike.’ In truth, it was quite embarrassing.

“Haaaaat! Eat this!”

“Kiyaaaaaaaaa!”

A dazzling white light gathered on my spear tip. The moment it pierced the Wraith Queen's stomach, it exploded beautifully. The Wraith Queen's throne shattered as she was sent flying back, hitting the wall. I knew all too well what she would do next. So I made my move first.

“DIEEEE!”

I collected all nearby energy and exploded it outward. The resonating sound seemed to shake the entire room. The Wraith Queen was no exception as she trembled with her half-transparent body.

[You used Orc Lord's Warcry! All party members are cleansed of negative status effects. All party members' attack power increases by 50 percent for the duration. All party members become super-armored, unfazed by enemy attacks.]

“KIYAAAAA!”

[Wraith Queen used Vengeful Spirit's Wail. Your super-armor state ignores its effect.]

Just like I predicted! Looking at the Wraith Queen staring at me blankly, I smirked. Taking out and drinking a lowest-grade Mana

Potion, I announced to her, “I don’t even need to use my trump card. I’ll end this within 5 minutes!”

What followed was an easy battle. Like I thought, the Wraith Queen was much easier than the Orc Lord. Her strength lied in Vengeful Spirit’s Wail, a status effect magic, and her ability to shoot out hundreds of ectoplasm arrows at once. My Orc Lord’s Warcry directly countered her Vengeful Spirit’s Wail and her ectoplasm arrow attack had a fatal weakness of stopping when she took a critical hit.

Before my Spiritual Shield wore off, I could deal a critical hit. Then I just had to use my restored mana to use Heroic Strike again.

Although it took over 3 years to completely conquer the Orc Lord, it only took a little over 4 months to conquer the Wraith Queen. How long would it take to conquer the next Floor Master, Dark Ratman? I snickered and checked the message windows popping up in front of me.

## Chapter 18. Dungeon Explores Can Awaken Too? (4)

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[A Grand Achievement! You defeated the Floor Master, Wraith Queen, alone! Amazing!]

[You obtained the title, 'Wraith Queen Slayer.' All stats permanently increase by 1. This effect will apply even if the title is not equipped.]

[You defeated the Wraith Queen alone. You obtained the special reward, 'Wraith Queen's Shirt.']

[You obtained 3,000 gold.]

[Choose your reward.]

[1. Spirit Mastery Magic Book.]

“Whew.”

As expected, I obtained another title. Along with the Orc Lord Slayer title, all of my stats were now permanently increased by 2.

I stood speechless for a while, then pinched my cheeks to wake myself up.

The first thing I did was to check the Wraith Queen equipment's set effect. I took off the Orc Lord equipment and put on the Wraith Queen equipment. I wondered if I also needed to equip the whip, but it appeared that wasn't the case.

[You equipped the Wraith Queen Set. Your magic and charm increases by 5. When the Wraith Queen Set is equipped, you can use 'Vengeful Spirit's Wail' once per day.]

"As expected..." After staring at the message window with lingering attachment, I shrugged. Then I switched my equipment back to the Orc Lord Set. Vengeful Spirit's Wail, a skill that changed the entire battlefield by affecting the enemy with confusion and fear status effects. It was undoubtedly a good skill. However, compared to the Orc Lord's Warcry, it felt too weak.

Why? Because it was possible that the enemy was immune to confusion or fear, or could use a priest-type cleansing skill. In that case, the skill would be useless. On the other hand, unless there was a monster that canceled the buff, Orc Lord's Warcry would always be useful.

I could only use one of the two skills, so I decided to choose the Orc Lord's Warcry. Although the Wraith Queen was a higher rank Floor Master, her equipment was cloth, inappropriate for a warrior type like me.

However, its black jacket, white pants, and shirt all had a good texture, making me want to wear them in my daily life.

Next up was the rewards. 3,000 gold was the normal amount given for defeating the Wraith Queen. What was important was the reward given for defeating it alone.

[1. Spirit Mastery Magic Book.]

“Another magic book? Spirit Mastery, huh.”

It made sense. Wraiths, the Wraith Queen, and the Soul Tempering Elixir all had to do with souls, so a magic book like this was expected to a certain extent. However, I hoped it would be a skill powerful enough to bring my strength to a new level.

“No, I shouldn’t complain. Magic books are said to be rare after all. Be more respectful, Kang Shin.”

It seemed I got greedy after seeing someone vastly stronger than me. I could get stronger. If I try to rush it, it would only work against me. I had to do it my way, slowly and steadily. I vowed to myself once again and put my hand inside the half-transparent window.

[You obtained the Spirit Mastery skill. Your affinity to souls and spirits increase. The strength of all soul and spirit-related skills increases. As the skill level increases, your affinity with souls and spirits will also increase.]

In other words, my Deific Manifestation skill would be stronger. I had a partner I could call once a month, Peruta. If Spirit Mastery's skill level rose, I might be able to summon him more often and for longer durations. When I thought about that, I was finally convinced that Spirit Mastery was a good skill.

“Alright then, let's go.”

It was time to collect the long-awaited quest reward. How would Loretta react? Excited for her reaction, I couldn't hide my smile.

[Quest Success!]

[You conquered the Floor Master Wraith Queen alone. As a feat unseen in 200 years, the Floor Shop owner, Loretta, is in awe. She is regretting her decision to make a bet out of revenge. However, she will still give out her reward. After all, she is an honest shop owner.]

[You received a system reward. You obtained 1 skill point. You now have 2 spare skill points.]

“Aguhueforkuralo.”

“Can you say that in human language? It seems I haven’t mastered alien language yet.”

“Uwaaaah, you really did it...”

She showed a reaction surpassing my expectation. Just yesterday, she seemed full of doubt, but now that I had really done it, she was spouting out strange words with a soulless expression. After I talked to her a few times, she started crying. How shameful.

“Sob, you’re right, I’m a bad woman who gives quests but hates seeing it be completed. Are you disillusioned?”

“No, it’s nothing new.”

“Uhuhuk!”

“Um, Loretta noona?”

When I called her hesitatingly, she turned toward me instantly.

“What? Can’t you see that I’m crying?”

“Um... Give me my reward.”



Like I'd fall for your tricks to skimp out on my reward.

“Hueeeee!”

“Now, now. Stop crying and give me my reward.”

“HUEEEEE!”

It took a long time before I could calm her down. Although her intentions were crystal clear, I had no choice as I had to collect my reward. Only after I made a promise to bring her ramen did she stop crying. It seemed a dungeon explorer from Earth had treated her before.

“You'll really bring me one?”

“Yeah.”

“Sob... Okay, I'll trust you.”

Loretta wiped away her tears, then handed me something.

“Take it. It's the best reward I can give you, customer.”

“This...?”

After receiving it, I tilted my head. It was a pocket watch. When I

opened the lid adorned with fancy jewelry, I saw a clock with only one hand. Just when I was wondering where the hour hand was, I realized the clock did not have any numbers written on it. Instead, in the places where the numbers should be were twelve small holes. The minute hand remained fixed between the 11th hour hole and the 12th hour hole.

The pocket watch was on a silver chain. Unlike its outer appearance adorned with fancy jewelry, the inside looked antique and rustic. I couldn't help but be disappointed when I opened it up. It... didn't even have a crown.

“Can I get angry?”

“Tsk, tsk. You have no eye for valuables. Try reading the item info.”

“I don't think that would change my mind. Let me see.”

Even as I sent Loretta looks of doubt, I checked the information of the pocket watch. Immediately afterwards, my eyes seemed to pop up from their sockets.

[???? (Secret – Subclass)

A pocket watch filled with unknown powers. Its beholder will eventually obtain a class befitting it.]

“... Class!?”

“Huhu, now you realize what a precious treasure that is!?”

“N-Noona, there’s a way to obtain a class?”

When I first entered the dungeon, I realized that I did not have a class. I expected to get a class like spearman, but even after all this time, I could not get a class. It seemed Ellos and Palludia had received the Knight and Priestess classes, so I couldn’t help but think something was wrong.

Not too long ago, when father became an ability user, he obtained a cool sounding class called Wave Attacker. Although he complained, saying that a traditional spearman like him should not have such a superhero-like class, I knew he was secretly bragging as he talked about getting bonus stats and few additional skills. My father really was childish.

In any case, I was the only dungeon explorer I knew that didn’t have a class! I felt bad, as it was like being told I had no ability. If possible, I wanted to at least have Crown Prince of 5F as my class.

But it was brought up now when I least expected it.

“Of course there is. In the first place, dungeon explorers from other continents who are appointed as knights or ordained as priests already possess classes before entering the dungeon. But

customer is different.”

“That’s right. I haven’t been appointed a knight or ordained as a priest.”

“Nor did you have the qualification.”

“That’s why I didn’t have a class?”

“Yes.”

I see, there was a reason I was treated like an unemployed person. Then, I remembered my father who had the Wave Attacker class, and asked Loretta.

“What about father?”

“Ah, that ‘ability’? That’s like a seal engraved directly on one’s soul. It would be a different story if he already had a class, but since he didn’t, of course he would get a class.”

“... There’s more that you know, right? About the things happening on Earth.”

“My, that’s a secret, customer.”

I didn’t think my inquiry on classes would lead to this. Although

I always wanted to find the relationship between the dungeon and what was happening on Earth, I didn't think I would hear it from the Floor Shop owner, Loretta.

Now that I thought about it, something was strange. Both Edias continent where Ellos came from and Luka continent where Palludia came from were being attacked by invaders, the so-called Demon race. Earth was in a similar situation, having to fight against invaders. This did not seem to be mere coincidence.

When I thought this far, I could feel my hair stand on end. However, before I had the chance to speak, Loretta placed her hand on my mouth to block it.

“Remember, customer. In the end, I am a shop owner that sells items to customers in need. I am on your side. As long as your willpower stands tall, the dungeon, too, will be of help to you.”

“ ... ”

“So for now, don't ask anythi-Kyaa! Why did you lick me!?”

Loretta screamed as she hurriedly pulled away her hand. I also experienced a strange sensation of licking woman's hand for the first time.

“It tastes weird... a bit salty, maybe?”

“It's not salty! Don't say something like that so casually!”

“What should I say then?”

“That’s...”

“Hehe, this is fine then, right?”

At my smiling expression, Loretta’s face reddened. Forgetting all about her anger, she smiled.

“... Really, what a strange customer.”

“You’re the one to talk, Loretta noona.”

“You can just call me Loretta, customer. Noona sounds like you’re emphasizing our age difference.”

“Loretta.”

“... Don’t call me without a reason. Really.”

The day I conquered the Wraith Queen, I obtained many things and learned a lot about the situation surrounding me. I felt that I had taken one more step toward becoming a true dungeon explorer.

The next day, I challenged the 15th Floor Master, Dark Ratman. I

died. For a week, I could not enter the dungeon.

## Chapter 19. Fall's New Students (1)

---

“Kyaa! Mom, oppa’s looking like his soul’s been sucked out!”

“He’s been like that for a while. He seems depressed. Go console him, you guys get along.”

“Haha, I defeated the Wraith Queen alone... Mm, yup. That won’t change. But the Dark Ratman...”

“Oppa, oppa! Snap out of it!” An angel from above... no, Yua shook my shoulders and I flopped about with no resistance.

Yua had a cute voice. She was the support that prevented me from falling. If Yua ever got a boyfriend, what should I do? Should I tear his limbs apart or should I kidnap... huk!

“Oppa!”

“Y-Yua.”

“Are you okay? Haa.”

When her scream woke me up from my daze, Yua let out a sigh of relief. Was she really worried that something was wrong with me? Kuk, how cute.

“Haha, no need to worry, Yua. Oppa is fine.”



“But you looked so soulless. You were murmuring something to yourself too.”

“You’re right... well, oppa just experienced some failure, is all.”

“Failure?”

“Yep. It looks like I was too arrogant.”

I remembered what happened just a moment ago. After saying goodbye to Loretta on the 10th floor, I rushed to the 15th floor boss room. I entered a random party and challenged the Dark Ratman.

“Alright, let’s get this over with and move up!”

The party leader was a middle-aged swordsman. That was perhaps why he was talking down to the party members. It was then that I started to feel apprehensive.

Including me, the party consisted of dungeon explorers from five different continents. No party could be successful without harmony among its members. However, with the party leader being so oppressive, it was hard to do. Sure enough, my apprehensive feeling came true.

“Come on, kill the ratmen!”

“You’re just charging straight at the ratmen! We should have discussed beforehand who would tank and who would lure the ratmen!”

First, the party leader and our damage dealer began to argue, while I silently hunted ratmen on the side. If not, the boss fight would have ended much quicker.

There were two healers, both from different continents than the party leader. As such, they made unsightly expressions at party leader’s oppressive tone. At the same time, our tanker, who was from the party leader’s continent, got along well with him.

“Kikikiki! Don’t look down on me just because I’m a rat!”

“Kill that rat bastard!”

The Dark Ratman was 2 meter tall, comparatively smaller than the other Floor Masters. As such, I thought that our tanker would be able to handle him. Of course, I was wrong.

“Kikik! Kikik!”

“Kuk, this rat’s attacks are too heavy! Heal!”

“Fuck...”

The tanker had the same personality as the party leader. The

healers seemed almost reluctant to heal. As a result, there were times where their timings were off. The party leader was clearly focused on attacking the Dark Ratman to collect contribution points. Our damage dealer, who had argued with the party leader, ended up missing some ratmen, which headed towards our tanker.

“What? Hey, what are you doing!? Get these off of me!”

“Fuck, just focus on the Dark Ratman!”

“Ah!”

As the tanker and party leader yelled irritably, the Dark Ratman became free to do as he wanted. I was hunting the ratmen one by one, but when I heard this, I rushed toward the Dark Ratman.

Although our smart magician instantly changed his target to the Dark Ratmen and cast an attack magic at it, the Dark Ratman was unfortunately too fast.

“Kikikik! I’ll burn you all up!”

[Dark Ratman uses Dark Thunder Explosion!]

What followed was an unforgettable sight. In an instant, a dark light burst out from the Dark Ratman’s body and struck the party leader and tanker who were closest to it. The two of them burnt up

in an instant and kneeled. I thought it would end there, but I was wrong. It was only the start.

“Kikikik! It’s a lightning party! Kikik!”

BOOM!

Just like the name suggested, black lightning exploded out. Both the party leader and tanker died in an instant, and I, who ran after the Dark Ratman, was no exception.

Neither my high HP nor my Orc Lord equipment were of any help. They only made the pain last longer. I lost consciousness, and when I woke up, I was outside the dungeon.

It was my fault. Or at least, I thought it was.

I had thought I could defeat the Dark Ratman no matter what these idiots did. For that reason, I didn’t try to stop their arguments nor did I say anything against the party leader’s foolish commands.

Now that I thought about it, I shouldn’t have stayed in that party in the first place. The moment I realized how dysfunctional it was, I should have left and looked for another one.

Finally, I should have attacked the Dark Ratman myself instead of relying on my party members. At the time, I was playing around too much. So much so that I was done in while I was hunting the

ratmen minions. It was inexcusable.

I was too excited from defeating the Wraith Queen alone. Even though I clearly knew there were 100,000 people above me! On Earth, not to mention the SS-rank, even the A-rank were stronger than me! No, perhaps even the B-rank were stronger. The dungeon was a place where one had to be alert at all times. Since I was fooling around with my guard down, it was only obvious that I died.

As I was reproaching myself, Yua suddenly placed her hand on top of my head.

“You can do it, oppa.”

“Yua...”

“I believe in oppa. You can definitely do it.”

“But...”

“Everyone makes mistakes, oppa.”

Yua slowly rubbed my head. I closed my eyes and waited for her words. At the same time, I became more relaxed.

“Oppa, someone who learns from his mistakes can do anything. So it will be the same for you, oppa.”

“... You’re right. Thanks, Yua. I promise you, I won’t make another mistake. I won’t be kicked out of the dungeon ever again.”

Yua’s words gently healed my broken self-esteem. If I stayed depressed after hearing that, I wouldn’t be a man. I resolved myself to never let my guard down, to never make such mistakes, to never be kicked out of the dungeon again!

I patted my admirable sister’s head. Yua squealed with her cute voice and twisted her body in delight without letting go of me. It was the sibling relationship I had wanted for such a long time.

Knowing how to comfort her brother... Yua had all grown up! Oppa swears he will make you happy! Hm, that doesn’t sound right. Right, I will protect this angel’s smile!

Having regained my energy from Yua’s magical words, I clenched my fists. Suddenly, a crashing sound rang out. When I looked, mother was trembling as she stared at us from the kitchen. On the ground was a frozen pork neck. She should really buy pork belly with how much father makes.

“N-No, you can’t! You guys are blood related! Don’t you dare think about it!”

“I said that’s not it! Is that all you think about, Mom?”

“But it’s too suspicious! Why else would two grown-ups be all

over each other on the couch!?”

Damn, being too awkward was a problem, but being too close is a problem too...!? With no one to complain to, I could only hold in my anger at the unfairness.

A week later, I challenged the Dark Ratman to a revenge match. This time, the party I was in gave off a good vibe. That said, I had planned to continue until I could defeat the Dark Ratman alone. It was best if I did not rely too much on my party. It would be fine as long as they didn't hinder me.

“Could it be...? Crown Prince-nim?”

However, the female party leader seemed to know me. Who was she? She was a beauty with pearl white skin, a blonde ponytail, and a sparkling green iris.

I had no recollection of meeting such a pretty girl. I asked if she heard of me from rumors, but she shook her head.

“Thanks to Crown Prince-nim, I broke through the 5th floor two years ago. I'm still grateful for it. Back then, I couldn't fulfill my role no matter what party I was in, so I became depressed, thinking I wasn't suited for the dungeon. I challenged the Orc Lord as a final challenge, and that was when I entered your party.”

“Ah... I see.”

“You were really cool that day... Following Crown Prince-nim’s commands, I gained confidence in myself. I was able to defeat my fear and stab my sword through the Orc Lord. After we defeated it, my confidence grew and I arrived here, partying with my comrades from the Luka continent.”

10 floors in 2 years. Although it was slightly slower than Ellos or Palludia, they were among the top in both talent and effort. A girl who was stuck on the 5th floor climbing this far in two years was undoubtedly praiseworthy.

I didn’t hesitate to reveal my thoughts.

“That’s incredible. You must have put in a lot of effort.”

“Ah, you were less informal then... can you talk casually like in the past? It would be too awkward otherwise...”

“No, how could I?”

Casual? I talked like that to a grown-up woman like her? Where were my manners?

Seeing me act flustered, she shook her hand as she giggled.

“No, you did. Because two years ago, I was a little kid who wasn’t even 130 sihai.”



“... Yes?”

Sihai. It was Luka continent's unit of measurement, equivalent to about 1.1 centimeter. In other words, she would have been about 143cm two years ago. But how was that possible? She looked well over 160cm now. How could anyone grow so much in two years? Now to mention, her amazing chest size... kuhum.

“Huhu, you're cute when you're flustered.”

“No, that's...”

“You don't have to be so surprised. People from the Luka continent experience a huge growth spurt at a certain age. It's a little more than people from other continents, so I suspect it's our people's special trait.”

“Ah, I see.”

It made sense. Even though we all looked like humans, we were from different worlds. Our growth periods being different wasn't so hard to accept. But for some reason, the word Luka continent seemed to remind me of someone.

‘Well, it's probably nothing.’ With that, I put away the thought.

## Chapter 20. Fall's New Students (2)

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“So? You’ll talk more casually, right?”

“Mm... Okay, yeah.”

“Then can you call me by my name? I’m Shina, Shina Gren Ehuir.”

“Okay, Shina. I’m looking forward to working with you. I’m Kang Shin. Call me Shin instead of an embarrassing name like Crown Prince.”

“Yes, Shin-nim!”

As Shina and I were exchanging our names, the other explorers from Luka continent looked flustered.

“Hold on...”

“You can’t...”

“K-Kuhum.”

“... Eh? Did I do something wrong?”

When I tilted my head and asked, their mouths twitched.

However, they soon shut their mouths, and only one person replied with a strange voice.

“It... It’s nothing.”

“That’s good to hear. Shina, I didn’t do anything wrong, did I?”

“You’re fine! Huhu, I was nervous after hearing how strong the Dark Ratman was, but with Shin-nim, I’m not afraid of anything!”

Shina quickly retorted and changed the topic immediately. She was right. We had to focus on fighting the Dark Ratman, not reminiscing about the past. It also wasn’t important that Shina seemed to remind me of Palludia, or that I completely forgot to contact her a week ago.

... I should really start begging Palludia for forgiveness. No, that’s absurd. We are only close enough to contact each other occasionally. Well, I should focus on the Dark Ratman first.

Although Shina might have been a little kid 2 years ago, she was now a brilliant party leader. She used all the information available about the Dark Ratman and formulated a solid battle plan. She calculated each party member’s abilities, and made sure each of them knew what they should do at any given moment. It wasn’t something anyone could do.

“Are we good to go? Shin-nim, everyone?”

“Yeah, I’m ready.”

“Yes!”

“Let’s go!”

‘Sorry to be a downer everyone, but I have no plans to focus on party play. Because I plan to conquer the Dark Ratman quicker than I conquered the 10th floor’s Wraith Queen.’

I gave myself one month. Of course, this excluded the time it would take me to get to the 20th floor. I knew that it was impossible to defeat the Dark Ratman alone at level 16.

Just like I always did, I planned to slowly lower the amount of people in my party. Of course, this was assuming that the Dark Ratman didn’t drop a stat increasing item like the Compressing Elixir or the Soul Tempering Elixir.

That said, I wouldn’t do something like deliberately offending or hindering other party members. I would follow the party leader’s plan. However... I would not take things slow like in Shina’s plan.

“Alright... let’s go!”

The moment the door to the boss room opened, I ran in. Although priests were casting elementary buffs to other party members, I did not receive them. I had to practice for when I would defeat the boss alone. I could not rely on buffs.

“Kikik, Human... Kugagak!”

I stabbed my glaive through the first ratman I saw. The Orc Lord's Glaive I had been using since the 6th floor was still effective. Although ratmen had high attack and maneuverability, they had low defense to compensate. As such, I could kill the ratman in one blow. Mana really was amazing. Just by coating my spear with it lightly, it had such effect.

“Wow, Crown Prince-nim.”

“You didn't receive a buff... right? You killed a ratman in one blow without receiving a buff?”

“Ah, Shin-nim, so cool...!”

“L-Leader! Snap out of it!”

The party members began to make their move. They were a beat slower than me, and that was enough. I had only fought the Dark Ratman once. I did not yet know how the raid flowed or how the Dark Ratman fought. Before I could completely grasp the flow of battle, I still needed their help.

What I had to do now was clear. My job was to kill the 40 ratmen scattered through the boss room as quickly as possible.

“Everyone focus on the Dark Ratman! Don’t commit on the attacking ratmen. Just send them flying back, I will take care of them!”

“Crown Prince-nim’s hunting them so fast, it doesn’t look like we’ll need to.”

“Free damage dealers, stick to the Dark Ratman! I heard it uses a strong skill if left open!”

‘You’ve done your research! My last party was massacred because no one knew about it.’ Remembering what happened in the last raid, I vented my anger on the ratmen.

“Kikik, kill that human!”

“Strong human! Too strong!”

“Steal his spear!”

Compared to the wraiths or the orcs, the ratmen were much more intelligent. They were the first to try to steal my glaive. However, ratmen began appearing from the 11th floor, and of course, it wasn’t the first time I faced ratmen trying to steal my spear. They had never succeeded once. They were always killed before they could.

“Haaaap!”

I pushed mana into my spear and thrust it forward. In an instant, the mana surged to the spear tip, forming a blade of mana and crushing the incoming ratmen. Although I could only maintain this state for less than a second, it was able to extend my spear for an instant. I called this Extending Spear, though I never said it out loud since it was such a senseless name.

“A-Aura!”

“No, rather than aura, it’s... pure mana?”

“Healers, don’t just watch. Use your heals! The boss is incredibly strong!”

The tanker cried out as he endlessly repeated between being attacked by the Dark Ratman and kiting it. The healers then apologized profusely and began to pour their heals on him.

Suddenly, the Dark Ratman let out a strange cry.

“Kagugagak! I’ll burn you all up!”

“Someone stop him!”

“He’s trying to use Dark Thunder Explosion!”

The tanker who understood my urgent call quickly raised his

shield and bashed the Dark Ratman's head with it.

“Kugagak! Don't disturb me!”

“Die!”

The Dark Ratman continued to try to use Dark Thunder Explosion. In response, the tanker, Shina, and other damage dealers all bombarded the Dark Ratman when they saw a chance. However, it was only enough to slow down the skill activation, not stop it. How absurd!

Feeling rushed, I took care of the rest of the ratmen with Tempest. A maelstrom of mana rose up, creating countless cuts on the ratmen and sending them flying to a single space. Just Tempest was not strong enough to kill them, so I clad my spear with mana and attacked the ratmen who were gathered together.

“DIE!”

The spear I thrust out with a spirited cry sent several ratmen's heads flying. I then cut down the remaining ratmen one by one. Suddenly, message windows popped up in front of me.

[Dark Ratmen uses Dark Thunder Explosion!]



[Party member Kart Von Jinas-nim died.]

[Party member Dezihard-nim died.]

[Party member Jieria-nim died.]

B-B-BOOM!

A small explosion followed by a large explosion instantly took out three party members. I quickly turned to the Dark Ratman. Its hair was standing, flashing out with black lightning. However, that was not a skill, just the aftermath of one. Dark Thunder Explosion had already ended, taking out all the damage dealers. The tanker was alive due to using a life-saving skill in the last moment.

“Heal! Heal!”

“Don’t die!”

The tanker was trembling in place. Was it a reaction from enduring such a powerful skill? Or did the skill inflict some status effect on him? Then, I noticed Shina, who was a damage dealer, was still alive.

“I ran back when I got a strange feeling. Before it activated Dark Thunder Explosion, it used another skill that froze nearby enemies. The other damage dealers who were hit by it couldn’t dodge in time.”

“As I thought...”

It seemed Shina was alive due to being outside Dark Thunder Explosion's area of effect. To escape in time, you needed to dodge the paralysis skill that came before. Alright, I remembered it. It seemed Dark Thunder Explosion was a skill you could not block.

There was only one way to survive it. That was to not get hit, like Shina had just done.

That said, now wasn't the time to leisurely think about its skill area of effect. The tanker was unable to protect himself as he was hit by the Dark Ratman, and the heals couldn't keep up with the damage being taken.

As if we had planned it out before, Shina and I ran toward the Dark Ratman, our weapons in hand.

“Hornet Pierce!”

Shina's attack was the first to hit the Dark Ratman. Her sword was dyed purple, and when it penetrated the Dark Ratman's abdomen, the Dark Ratman's face was also dyed purple. Its claws attacking the tanker stopped midair. Then, as if it was drunk, it began to spin in place. Could that be?

“It's poison! It will stay like that for a moment!”

I didn't know how long a moment was, but I stopped Tempest I was in the middle of using and stood tall. Then, I held my spear up high and began to focus on energy on it.

“Kuk, such a huge mana pool... is he really level 15!?”

‘Well, the Soul Tempering Elixir and Peruta Circuit helped a lot.’ Answering him in my mind, I poured all the mana I had into the spear in my hand. It wasn't just mana. To burst out with as much strength as possible, I concentrated my entire strength into the tip of the spear.

Father always said to thrust out with the resolve to collapse the world. My ancestors called it the Heaven Collapsing Strike. I called it the Heroic Strike.

From the spear tip, white light exploded out, dyeing the entire boss room.

“Ahhh!”

“So the rumors are true. He really is a Hero.”

I would eventually come to know what this white light signified. For now, I was focused solely on concentrating my energy in one place.

“Prepare to die!”

“Kugagak!”

The Dark Ratman seemed to be somewhat recovered from Shina’s poison as it sensed danger and tried to distance itself from me. Unfortunately for the Dark Ratman, it was too late.

I smirked and launched my spear forward. That is, I threw it. A spear imbued with energy did not lose that energy just because it was separated from the body. If anything, the forward momentum made it stronger.

“Kugaga, kugagagak!”

The spear stabbed into the Dark Ratman’s chest. Perhaps sensing its death, the Dark Ratman let out a final laugh. Thinking it was annoying even until the end, I raised my body, which had bent down after throwing the spear, up. Immediately afterwards, the light on the spear tip exploded.

BOOM!

## Chapter 21. Fall's New Students (3)

---

“Shin-nim, why are you taking something like that?”

The fight ended. I, of course, had the highest contribution. Because three people died, there were only seven rewards to choose from. From them, what I chose was the ‘Thunder Crystal.’

On the outside, it looked just like a transparent crystal, but black sparks filled in the inside, making it look like a plasma globe. The moment I laid my eyes on it, I was sure it was a medicine just like the Compressing Elixirs or the Soul Tempering Elixir. However, it seemed Shina thought I refused the good reward.

“I’m going to hunt a lot of Dark Ratman, so don’t worry about it.”

“Yes? So there was a reason why you hunted the 5th Floor Master for 3 years?”

Mm... there was, but at the same time, there wasn’t. I debated whether to explain to her or not. In the end, I nodded my head.

“Yep. You know about it, right? That Floor Masters drop items that increase stats.”

“I do, but I heard the chances are low and that there are limits to how much you can consume them. I even heard that they weren’t guaranteed to raise your stats, so I didn’t think anyone would

challenge the Floor Masters for them. Not to mention, Floor Masters are dangerous. If you die, you wouldn't be able to enter the dungeon for a week."

"Muscle, Bone, and Skin Compressing Elixirs all have pretty high drop rates, though you have to meet certain conditions to consume them. What's important is how high your contribution is. If they really don't drop, you can always lower the number of people in the party."

"Also, it's not that they don't work sometimes. It's just that after the first one, you have to consume several of them to have the same effect. Whoever told you must have been confused. Ah, of course, there is a limit. Each stat can only go up by 10 at most."

"Wow..."

Hearing my words, Shina gasped. Staring at me, she asked.

"Could Shin-nim have... for all the Floor Masters...?"

"It's only the 5th and 10th Floor Master, but yeah, I consumed all the stat increasing elixirs to the limit."

"As expected, my eyes weren't wrong... Unni's too..."

"Unni?"

“I-It’s nothing, Shin-nim.”

Shina shook her head, then said with a sigh, “Fighting the Floor Master dozens of times... I don’t have the confidence. I can’t even imagine doing it. The week where I can’t enter the dungeon after dying is... like hell. I know how strong you are, but to think you could take the risk to continually challenge the Floor Master. Huhu, in that way, your strength makes sense. It’s not just the body’s strength, but the mind’s.”

“You’re praising me too much.”

All explorers had reasons to enter the dungeon. Although slightly different than others, it was the same for father. Because the dungeon was the source of income for our family, he could not be careless.

Although he put himself at risk to obtain mana, once he awakened, he never challenged the Floor Master again. Explorers from other continents were under even more dire circumstances, and thus could not act carelessly. Of course, there were still those who acted arrogantly and caused their parties to be annihilated.

In any case, I was in a much better situation compared to them. Although a crisis struck the world I lived in, the situation was not that serious yet. Well, I wondered what would happen at first, but the situation never came down to threatening my family.

That was why I could be bold in exploring the dungeon. That was why I could slowly and leisurely seek to get stronger.

I was just lucky. That was what I thought. If Earth was in a desperate situation like Luka or Edias continent, I would not have been able to spend several months just to fight the same boss. I would not have had the chance to even find out I could increase my stats through grinding the boss. After all, I would have known a mana cultivation method if Earth was like the other continents.

Regardless, it seemed hard to convince this girl staring at me with eyes full of admiration. As such, I kept my silence. Shina seemed to be drawing her own conclusions.

Anyway, I successfully defeated the Dark Ratman and obtained the qualification to advance to the 16th floor.

[You consumed a Thunder Crystal. Your resistance to lightning increases slightly. Your affinity with lightning increases.]

“... Haa?”

The Thunder Crystal I swallowed expecting a stat increase gave a result that was both hard and not hard to accept. Even if my affinity with lightning increased, it did not matter since I was not a magician.

I did like the increased resistance to lightning. Since consumable item effects seemed to stack up to ten times, my resistance to



lightning could increase nine more times. When that happened, I would not need to worry so much about lightning magic.

‘What a shame.’

Compared to the sweet fruit the 5th and 10th Floor Masters gave, the Thunder Crystal felt disappointing. It seemed I could only look forward to the Dark Ratman Set and the Dark Ratman Slayer title. I didn’t know whether to be happy about having a shorter grind or sad about not having the chance to increase my stats.

With a sigh, I stood in front of the stair to the 16th floor. I could not repeat the same mistake forever.

“Alright, I’m ready.”

With a serious expression, I opened the friend window. Including Shina, I had only friended three people. I looked for Palludia’s name. It was there. She was inside the dungeon.

I clicked on her name and sent her a message.

“Palludia, it’s me.”

[...]

“Sorry, Palludia, for not replying to your messages before. I was in a dangerous situation, so I meant to contact you later, but...”

[Who is this?]

“It’s me, Kang Shin.”

[I don’t know anyone with that name.]

“No, I... sorry.”

[I don’t know what you’re sorry about. Like I said, I don’t know an orc like you.]

‘You do remember! Also, I’m not an orc!’

“Whew, I was wrong. Forgive me.”

[That’s what you have to say after ignoring me for so long? That’s it?]

‘What else would I do?’ I felt the urge to complain, but I calmed myself down by thinking of Yua’s smiling face. Yep, I calmed down right away.

“Sorry, if there’s anything you want me to do, tell me.”

[Hmph, like you could heal my wounded pride. Don’t be stupid.]

“Don’t be like that. A chance like this doesn’t come often.”

[You don’t sound sorry at all! Do you know how much I... uk.]

“Hm? What?”

[Don’t ask!]

Palludia. She was like a medical book. I couldn’t understand her from start to end.

[... You’ll do anything?]

“If it’s within my ability.”

[Fine, you cowardly Orc.]

“Go on.”

[...]

Palludia was silent for a moment. Just when I was wondering if she was fed up and about to delete me from her friend list, she sent me a message.

[Hurry up.]

“Hm?”

[Climb up quickly! To the 25th Floor Master!]

“Eh?”

[I’m saying I’ll wait for you! So hurry to the 25th floor! We can defeat the Floor Master together!]

“Uh, let’s make that 30th floor.”

[Hey!]

It would take me several months to grind in the 15th and 20th floor. However, Palludia seemed uninterested by my offer.

[I’ll give you three months, so you better reach the 25th floor by then! Otherwise, I won’t meet you ever again!]

“H-Hey!”

[No buts!]

With that the message ended. I tried to contact her again but she did not respond. This girl, did she even know what floor I was on? And what did she mean she wouldn’t meet with me again? Wasn’t

the last time we saw each other almost four years ago?

I was speechless.

“Three months? That’s impossible. What an unreasonable girl...”

I murmured to myself and sighed. Although she called me Orc, I knew she considered me to be her friend. Because I knew I was in the wrong, I wanted to make up for it, but that did not mean I would ruin my pace for it. If she didn’t want to see me, then she wouldn’t. I made my resolve.

However, Loretta from the 15th Floor Shop smiled at me.

“Customer, you had a girlfriend?”

“No, she’s just a friend. Can you stop smiling like that? It’s creepy.”

“You made fun of me before, customer, so it’s only fair that I do the same.”

“Don’t be absurd. Besides, Palludia is really just a friend. One that easily gets angry, treats me like an orc, is short, and has a small chest.”

“She’s your friend? That sounds more like a mortal enemy.”

Loretta made a rare serious expression and advised me.

“You should sever all ties with her immediately. From what I see, she’ll do something perverted to customer. Like kidnapping you and using you as a sex slave.”

“What did you say?”

I gave Loretta the coldest look I made in my entire life.

“ ... ”

“D-Don’t look at me like that! I just happened to read a novel like that recently!”

“ ... ”

“Ah, your eyes got colder! My heart’s going to freeze, please look away!”

Loretta spent the next 10 seconds unfreezing herself, then took something out from her pocket as I was heading up to the 16th floor.

“Customer, here’s a special offer from the Floor Shop!”

“You’re trying to sell me something again?”

“This here is a very special item. It’s a ticket that ignores the once a day limit for battling the Floor Master and allows one to challenge it again! It’s the ‘Floor Master Battle Voucher!’

“If you had something like that, why didn’t you tell me sooner!?”

“It’s being sold at the cheap price of 3,000 gold!”

“6 million won!?”

I almost passed out from the shock. I understood why she only told me about it now. Each time I defeated the Wraith Queen alone, I got 3,000 gold. The Dark Ratman gave 5,000 gold, from which I only received 500. I would be losing 2,500 gold every time I used it.

“That’s crazy expensive.”

“But customer, isn’t it enticing? In truth, I’m selling it at the manufacture cost because no one has bought any in the past 300 years. They aren’t normally this cheap!”

“If it’s so unpopular that no one bought any in 300 years, can’t you make it cheaper?”

Loretta didn’t seem to flinch at my reasonable claim.

“I have to at least take the manufacture cost! Customer, I’m already being generous with my offer. Not to mention, this isn’t something anyone can buy. Ah, by the way, you can only use up to two per day. So, in total, you would be able to fight the Floor Master three times a day!”

Looking at Loretta’s sincere eyes, I knew she wasn’t lying. It was true that I had a lot of gold stockpiled. But if I continued to buy those things to fight the Dark Ratman, I would eventually dry.

That said, if I used them, I would be able to finish grinding the 15th and 20th Floor Masters and reach the 25th floor in 3 months. I was certain. Setting my promise with Palludia aside, just the prospect of quickening my growth tempted me. In that case...

“... Fine.”

“Oh! So you’ll buy them!?”

“I’ll buy them after I reach the 20th floor.”

“Aww.”

Loretta made a disappointed expression. I smiled and waved my hand at her. Then, I continued on my way to the 16th floor. Three months, huh. I wonder why she was so bent on meeting me in three months.

‘Well, Palludia, I’ll see you then. Don’t be too surprised after



seeing my changed appearance.'

## Chapter 22. Fall's New Students (4)

---

Since the Two Moon incident occurred around the school entrance season, all schools had to delay their opening by at least half a year. The teachers, who were on paid vacation, were the only ones happy about the situation. When things settled down and society returned to normal operations, schools began their semester-late opening.

“School starting in the fall, huh.”

I, who was hard at work to break through the 19th floor, received a notice from my college. It was now the start of September, a time when cool winds washed away the heat of summer.

Thinking how the graduation would be messed up, I headed towards the school opening ceremony. With all the freshmen gathering with their puffed up cheeks, one would think it was a toad reunion. As I laughed to myself silently, someone silently brushed past me.

“Whoa.”

“...”

Who I thought was a guy turned out to be a girl. She was covering herself with a grey hoodie, but her clear eyes and full lips strongly suggested her sexual identity. She seemed surprised by my shout as she stared at me fixedly, then tilted her head and walked away.

I noticed something strange. She was clearly brushing past people, but no one seemed to notice. Although it could have been a coincidence, I knew the more likely answer.

“Damn, she was an ability user.”

I almost revealed my identity. Ability users were not required to join Guardian or Freedom Wing and fight monsters. I told myself to act more unmoved by strange happenings as I continued on my way.

“Everyone must know by now how fortunate it is to enter college at such a tumultuous time and be taught by professors equipped with new found knowledge and passion! Before we send you off into society as a proud alumni of our school...”

The university president’s speech was similar to my high school principal’s in that they both seemed to have strong sleep-inducing skills. As I pinched my thighs to keep myself awake, I suddenly felt a strange gaze.

It was not a gaze filled with killing intent, but rather one of curiosity. Was it the ability user from before? As I promised to act more placid a moment ago, I ignored the gaze that was growing sharper. Although it seemed to contain a hint of killing intent, I continued to ignore it.

The opening ceremony was a very long and boring event. Thinking I would rather fight two Dark Ratman at once, I endured

through the ceremony.

After the opening ceremony, the tradition was for new students to attend an introductory party, but as I had the important mission of going to the dungeon, I chose to skip it. As I secretly snuck out of the auditorium, I felt a presence approaching me.

“Haa.”

With a sigh, I started walking away, trying to ignore the presence. However, the presence continued to follow, approaching from the right side. Should I ignore it? Or should I avoid it? After a short contemplation, I decided to ignore it. However, the presence immediately clung to me. As expected, it was the hoody girl from before.

“Who are you?”

“Ah, you surprised me!”

I acted surprised and brushed her aside. I was truthfully surprised. I did not expect her to jump on me like that. As I glared at her, she glared back at me.

“Who are you? How did you see through my stealth?”

“What about you? At first, you brush past me, now you suddenly jump on me.”

“I’m an ability user.”

“Ah...”

Well, I knew that. I should have thought the question through more.

“I’m not affiliated with any group. You came after me on purpose, right? To take me to Guardian or Freedom Wing?”

“No, sorry to inform your ego, but I’m just an ordinary person. Guardian or Gardevoir, Freedom Wing or Gundam Wing, I don’t care. Are we good? I’m off then.”

“W-Wait!”

“Adios!”

‘If you’re an ability user and you want to avoid people’s attention, you’ll have to do more research!’

Everyone was lined up along the parking lot, seemingly waiting for rides to the freshman opening party. I would have escaped without anyone knowing had it not been for that hoody girl.

However, I was not afraid. A man had to bold! I ignored the several gazes falling on me and continued onward. You had to be

bolder in situations like this. Unfortunately, the hoody girl kept following me.

“Are you really an ordinary person?”

“Yep.”

“You’re lying.”

“I’m not.”

“Then how did you see through my stealth? That was the first time it happened.”

“Stealth is walking through people with your head down? I didn’t know.”

“Kuk, my stealth is like that. As long as I didn’t release it or attack something, I wasn’t discovered. At least, until now.”

“Then you can modify your data with what happened today. Good? I’m off then.”

“Uuu, you said that just to make me reveal details about my ability, right?”

My blood pressure was rising. I thought Palludia was the most

annoying girl in the world, but it seemed there was someone else. Too lazy to even reply, I walked out of the plaza, but the hoody girl ran toward me in a hurry and clung to my arm.

“What are you doing!?”

“What?”

“Aren’t you going to the freshman opening party?”

“... You’re asking about that?”

Thinking that this hoody girl might be an idiot, I replied, “No, I’m not.”

“Aren’t you a freshman?”

“I am.”

“Your name?”

I felt like I was getting investigated. Since I was already at it, I decided to continue acting twisted.

“I won’t tell you.”

“You can’t say it because you’re not a freshman, right?”

“I’m not saying it because I don’t want to. And if you want to ask for someone’s name, you should give your own first.”

“I’m Su Ye-Eun from the business department.”

“Got it. Take care, Su Ye-Eun.”

“Your name!”

“I said to give your name if you wanted to ask mine. I never said I’d tell you my name.”

“Eeeek! You’re dodging the question!”

Su Ye-Eun continued to cling to my arm. I was beginning to grow angry from the hoody girl’s incessant behavior. Should I make her let go of me using my power? Wouldn’t it get annoying afterwards? ... I’m going to have to continue my act. Agh, I got bit by the worst kind of dog.

“Can you let go of me, please? I’m telling you, I’m not an ability user. Ah, the bus is leaving.”

“Ah.”

Su Ye-Eun made a blank expression. Buses holding students from their respective departments were leaving. It did not take long for



all the freshman to find their way onto their bus. It was rather surprising. Regardless, Su Ye-Eun who seemed to want to go to the freshman opening party was now left alone.

“Alright, I’m off. Good luck, abandoned Su Ye-Eun.”

“Hey, who’s abandoned!?”

“No, I didn’t say that at all.”

“You totally did!”

Su Ye-Eun frowned and continued pulling on me. The bus was already gone so I don’t know why she was pulling on me for. Regardless, I continued walking forward. Su Ye-Eun naturally was dragged with me. Sadly, I was also in the business department. What if I saw her in my classes?

“It’s all your fault! I missed the opening party!”

“It’s because you kept clinging onto me.”

“Delinquent, liar, crook!”

“Shut it hoody girl!”

“H-Hoody girl...”

My university had a clear separation between the engineering and liberal arts campus. The engineering campus was a little ways away from Seoul. The opening ceremony was held at the engineering campus, while the graduation was held at liberal arts campus. That is, we were now the only ones left in the countryside.

After I completely left the campus, Su Ye-Eun seemed to have grown tired of being dragged around as she let go of my arm and was walking by me silently. Inside her hoody, her expression was all frowns.

“Haa, because of this guy... this is the worst...”

“Stop murmuring. It’s all your fault.”

“Are you really not an ability user?”

“Stop asking will you? I’m going to report you otherwise.”

“... Then buy me food.”

“Why!?”

This woman’s way of thinking was definitely out of the ordinary. My head began to hurt. Before I noticed it, we were at near the station. With all the people and cars around, I was thinking about

making a run for it. It was then that Su Ye-Eun murmured quietly.

“I have no money... I’m hungry...”

“...”

For the first time since Palludia, I felt like hitting a girl.

I brought Su Ye-Eun to a nearby McDonald’s. I watched her order a Big Mac with large fries plus extra, then ordered whatever for myself.

“You don’t need more fries?”

She looked at me strangely, almost like ordering more fries was the norm. I ignored her completely, took my plate from the employee and walked to a seat by the window. Su Ye-Eun asked why we were going there when there were better seats open, then she stole the plate out of my hands and walked to a seat at the center. She then murmured, “Is he really stupid?”

“Ah... Ah....!”

It wasn’t too late. I’ll first put in a hook to her stomach, then...! However, she was currently holding on our food. Since I couldn’t waste it, I decided to hold back. Feeling pitiful, I followed her and sat down.

“Thanks for the food.”

“You’re welcome.”

Su Ye-Eun unwrapped her Big Mac then took a big bite. Then, with her eyes sparkling even from inside the hoody, she took a handful of fries and ate it. Then, she took another handful. Seeing her cheeks puffed up like a hamster, I couldn’t help but laugh.

“You must have been really hungry.”

“Nom nom... nom...”

She sounded like she was chanting some black magic, but she was probably saying she starved since the morning. I gave her my share of fries. Then, she looked surprised, staring between me and the fries.

“... Angel?”

“That’s a quick change.”

“You bestowed fries upon me.”

“Don’t talk like that, it creeps me out.”

I also unwrapped my burger and bit down. It was delicious. Since

mother never let me eat like this at home, it had been a long time since I had junk food. Mm, maybe Yua would like it too. She might even give me a kiss on the cheek!

In the end, while Su Ye-Eun was in the restroom, I secretly ordered another burger set, entered the restroom, and stored it in my inventory. It was the perfect crime. Time was frozen inside the inventory, so it would be hot and crunchy no matter when I took it out.

When we left McDonald's, she seemed to remember what situation she was in, as she separated herself from me and stood guard. She looked completely different from the one who just called me an angel. Was she simply an idiot? Yep, she must be.

“Are we good? Go home now.”

“You... You really aren't an ability user?”

“I'm not, and you're an ability user that begged an ordinary person for food after bugging and annoying him.”

“...”

“So can we just go home now... Eh?”

Su Ye-Eun looked strange. It wasn't an expression of anger. Rather, it seemed to be frozen completely. Sensing that something was off, I turned around.

In front of us was a 2 meter tall pigeon, seemingly having appeared out of nowhere.

## Chapter 23. Fall's New Students (5)

---

Because it was the first time I saw a monster outside of the dungeon, I tensed up for a second. But because the monster looked exactly like a pigeon, I relaxed. Of course, I knew better than to let my guard down around a monster, regardless of its looks.

As I made this mental note, my body shook. I thought I had received a KaTalk, but it turned out Su Ye-Eun was shaking like a vibrating cellphone.

“M-Monster.”

“... Oy? Ability user, oy.”

“S-S-S-Scary.”

“Aren't you an ability user?”

“I-I c-can't do a-anything with my a-ability.”

“Not with that a-a-a-attitude.”

The people nearby were already running away screaming. With that size, it probably couldn't chase us underground. I took the frozen Su Ye-Eun by her arm and began running.

“Snap out of it! We're running!”

“N-N-N-No, scary. W-We’re going to die.”

“Come on, what happened to the person cornering me asking me if I was an ability user!?”

Fortunately, Su Ye-Eun was light, so it was not too hard running while dragging her. However, it seemed that pigeon was coming after us. Before we could reach the underground road, the pigeon flapped its wings and landed in front of us, completely blocking the way. I clicked my tongue and began running towards the opposite direction.

“Did you plaster yourself with honey? Why is it chasing us!?”

“I-I-I don’t know! I’m scared, save me!”

“Just don’t open your mouth! Screw it, I’m holding you.”

“H-H-Holding me?”

In an instant, I lifted her legs and put her in a princess carry. Feeling that my arm had gotten lighter, I continued to run. I was much faster running while carrying her than while dragging her along.

Should I go to where lots of people are? No, that would only make it dangerous for others. Was that the only underground road



entrance? No, but the others were already filled with evacuees. I couldn't bring the pigeon there. Then do I continue running until either Guardian or Freedom Wing showed up? That would be announcing that I'm an ability user. Then...!

“Ugh, Su Ye-Eun, you're making this so much harder for me!”

“M-M-Me? Why?”

“Stop shaking!”

I changed my direction to a deserted alleyway. Would others think of me as a hero leading the monster away from others? Or would they just think I'm a fool? When I reached the alleyway, people watching from the windows screamed and shut their windows. Looking around, I found security cameras installed nearby.

‘Not here.’ I continued running. Buildings became sparse. It seemed I was at a construction site, as building materials were stacked nearby.

‘Alright, perfect.’ It was crucial that I was in a place where no security cameras could watch me.

I glanced back. The pigeon flew past my head and landed at the construction site. I first let Su Ye-Eun down. She shouted with teary eyes, “W-Why did you come here? Why did you bring me too!?”

“Hey, Su Ye-Eun.”

“What!?”

“You better keep this a secret.”

“...?”

I picked up an iron pipe from nearby. It was 2 meters long with the ideal thickness and weight. Although it bothered me that it had a dull end, I couldn't do anything about it now.

Seeing me pick up the iron pipe by my strength, Su Ye-Eun's eyes opened wide.

“Y-You're an ability user!”

“It's a secret. Keep it.”

I held the iron pipe with both hands and glared at the pigeon. It was hard to understand why it was targeting us. Was it targeting me or Su Ye-Eun? Although I wanted to know the answer, with no way of talking to it, I could only kill it.

The pigeon began to flap its wings. Before it could fly up, I switched the iron pipe to one hand and threw it forward. White light spiraled around the entire pipe. It was my mana, one that

caused other dungeon explorers to call me a Hero.

Boom!

That was it. The iron pipe penetrated the pigeon, pinning it to the wall. Mm, although its size was big, it was incredibly weak. Now I just had to get rid of all the evidence.

I checked around one more time for security cameras or anyone watching. Then, I put my hand on the bleeding carcass and stuffed it in my inventory. My inventory expanded by 10 slots each time I leveled up, so I now had 190 slots.

“So it actually goes in.”

“Kyaaaak!”

I ignored Su Ye-Eun’s scream completely and stuffed the bloodied iron pipe into my inventory. Now, I only had to clean the pigeon’s blood. As for the carcass, it would come in useful one day. For example, when father registered as an ability user, he could turn it in for money. It was the perfect crime!

“Su Ye-Eun, let’s go.”

“Y-You...”

She still seemed unable to calm down as she trembled with her

mouth opened wide. I sighed and held her hand, dragging her.

“Let’s go. We’re going to get found out otherwise.”

“A-Ability user... You lied.”

“I’m not an ability user.”

I refuted her in anger. Then, with a face full of pride, I told her, “I’m a dungeon explorer.”

“... What’s that?”

Of course, I regretted it immediately. It seemed I needed to raise my intelligence stat more.

\*

19th floor of the dungeon. Along with the past three floors, it was a place filled with lizardmen, humanoid lizards with hard scales.

Strangely, these guys wielded spears. Although I battled them at first thinking I could learn something from them, I soon found out they could only stab with brute strength.

However, because they attacked simultaneously in groups, their attacks were difficult to dodge. Of course, that was for ordinary

dungeon explorers, not me. My training wasn't so soft that they were a match for me.

“Shwik, attack the scraggy human!”

“He looks flavorless.”

“Mind your own business!”

With a spirited shout, I swung my Orc Lord's Glaive and shook away the approaching spears. I then lowered my center of mass and charged straight at them. Because the lizardmen's spears were 3 meters long, there was a huge opening once they missed their attacks.

Even now, they couldn't take a counter offensive stance as they watched me rush towards them.

“Shwik, dodge him!”

“Too late!”

With a short curse, the glaive I struck out pierced through a lizardman's neck. However, there was more than just one lizardman. I hastily took out the glaive and confirmed my next target.

“Avenge our brethren!”

“Shwik, avenge him!”

“They’re coming like bees.”

I imbued mana into my glaive, once again swinging and striking down their spear attacks. I tightly gripped my glaive and, in a sequence of fast and elaborate moves, pierced the necks of the lizardmen one by one. Of course, having fought the lizardmen for over a month, I knew their movement patterns in and out, making it easy.

The only problem was my mana. Because of the lizardmen’s hard leather, it was impossible to kill them in one blow without using mana. As a result, my hunting speed naturally slowed down and it took over a month to climb to the 19th floor.

Of course, when I told Ellos about it, he bitterly said, “You bugged bastard!” In truth, I wanted to encounter a real bug. Apparently, Ellos had found one on the 22nd floor and obtained a Unique-grade sword. I was dying of jealousy.

“Kuaaak! Strong human!”

“Call for reinforcement!”

“Reinforcement, called!”

“Reinforcement coming! Kruna coming!”

‘Hm?’

When I began to quickly dwindle their numbers, they began to spout something different. It was the first time something like this happened since I entered the dungeon.

Kruna. If I understood correctly, it did not mean reinforcement. It was a name. I had heard of it before. Normally, monsters from dungeon floors did not have names. However, it seemed a named monster appeared with an extremely low chance.

These named monsters were much stronger than normal monsters and could even use skills. In exchange, they had a low chance of dropping a rare item. Most of the time, however, it ended in disappointment.

‘A named monster on the 19th floor. Curse my luck.’

Why did it have to be a named monster and not a bug? I complained as I fixed my grip on the glaive. Although I had been repairing it at the Floor Shop, I started to want a new spear. Since all the lizardmen were carrying spears, I expected the 20th Floor Master would as well. No, I sincerely hoped so.

I leisurely hunted down the lizardmen, when suddenly, I felt a sharp presence. I backed off a little. When I laid my eyes on the presence, I was dumbfounded.

“There was a female!? Shouldn’t you be called a lizardwoman then?”

“Human, don’t stare! You, not my type!”

How did I know? For one, there was a light pink ribbon on her smooth, scaly head. Unlike the lizardmen who were carrying spears, this guy... or rather, gal, was wearing a fancy robe and carrying a wooden staff. But wait, what did she just say?

“Heroic Strike!”

“Shashak, kkueek!”

Angered by her words, I instantly imbued all my energy in my spear and threw it. It was no doubt the Heroic Strike. Without even a chance to react, Kruna screamed and perished when the spear penetrated Kruna’s abdomen.

Until now, I had to spend dozens of seconds to concentrate the energy in my body on the spear. However, I had just succeeded in activating the skill in an instant. If possible, I didn’t want it to happen this way!

[You defeated the named monster, Kruna. You obtained the reward, ‘Headband of Wisdom.]



[High-rank Spear Technique became level 4! Your insight into the Way of the Spear increases. The amount of mana required for High-rank Spear Technique decreases slightly. You can display your full strength with any spear.]

[You created the skill Heroic Strike! It concentrates the body's energy and mana into one point and strikes out. It uses the HP and MP of the user proportional to the charging time. This skill may only be used by its creator. The skill level is adjusted to lower-rank level 7.]

[You created a skill! Heroic Strike is a skill that never existed elsewhere. Created with the most exquisite combination of energy and mana, this skill is a feat which must be passed down to future generations. You obtained 1 skill point as reward. Current skill points: 3]

“Eh...?”

Wait, what's this? Creating a skill?

I could not understand why Heroic Strike had suddenly been systematically recognized as a 'skill.' Regardless, an extra skill point was always appreciated. Not to mention, becoming a skill meant that its might was guaranteed. All in all, it was nothing but good news.

At this unexpected gain, I grew excited and even forgot about the disgust I felt from Kruna. As I was about to check the skill, I finally

noticed the lizardmen growling and surrounding me.

“Ah.”

“He killed Kruna!”

“Male killed pretty female!”

“Kill Human!”

“Pretty? What is? The ribbon?”

At my inquiry of sincere curiosity, the lizardmen reacted sensitively.

“Shaaaak!”

“Killed precious female! Kill male!”

“Shwik, we cut it!”

“C-Cut what? Y-You bastards! Don’t get near me!”

Taken by surprise, I couldn’t help but stutter. Only after I blew them away with Tempest did I find my calm.

“Don’t be so harsh. You wouldn’t be able to tell she’s female without the ribbon anyways!”

“Shwiik! Kill Human!”

“Human insult dead Kruna!”

“Kill Human!”

[You created the skill, ‘Provoke.’ Shouting out with a bit of mana, it draws the nearby enemies toward you. A skill suited for a warrior of noble mindset that wishes to protect his weak allies by means of self-sacrifice, it requires 10 MP per use.]

“W-What?”

Something was strange. I had not gained any new skills since Spirit Mastery, but I just created Heroic Strike and Provoke out of the blue. But was it me or was this skill description trying to make fun of me?

“Alright, fine! All of you, come at me! I’ll reach the 20th floor today!”

[You used the skill, Provoke! You draw nearby enemies toward you!]

---

“Die!”

“Kill Human!”

“Shwik, avenge Kruna!”

“Human meat!”

“Meat down there!”

“Down where? Where do you think you’re aiming!?”

After that, I ran around so much gathering up lizardmen that blisters formed and popped.

Killing the gathered up lizardmen with Heroic Strike was much more efficient. The downside was that I paid too big a price to find out. It seemed I needed to raise my intelligence more.

# Chapter 24. I Can Hear Your Voice (1)

[You became level 20. You obtained the qualification to challenge the Floor Master.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[You became Bronze Rank 1. If you defeat the 20th Floor Master, you will be acknowledged as a Silver Rank dungeon explorer.]

[Name: Kang Shin Race: Human Sex: Male

Class: None Title: Wraith Queen Slayer Rank: Bronze 1

Level: 20

HP – 6,270/6,270 MP – 2,940/2,940

Strength – 55(+9) Dexterity – 49(+2) Constitution – 59(+7)

Intelligence – 20(+2) Magic – 47(+2) Charm – 31(+2) Luck – 10(+2)

Skill – Low-rank Martial Arts (Master), Mid-rank Martial Arts

(Lv 9), Low-rank Spear Technique (Master), Mid-rank Spear Technique (Master), High-rank Spear Technique (Lv 4), Low-rank Spirit Mastery (Lv 2), Low-rank Heroic Strike (Lv 7), Low-rank Provoke (Lv 1), Peruta Circuit (Lv 2), Deific Manifestation]

“Oh, you obtained a named drop item?”

“Yes, Loretta.”

As I wrapped myself in bandages (5 gold) after fierce hours of battle, I answered Loretta at the 19th Floor Shop.

Although leveling up restored HP and MP, it strangely did not heal all wounds. As such, I would sometimes collapse after breaking through a floor.

She received the pink ribbon Kruna dropped and examined it. Then, with a satisfied expression, she offered, “I’ll buy it for 500 gold.”

“I’m not selling it.” I replied immediately.

“Ueh!?”

Loretta seemed surprised by my clear-cut answer. I snorted as I tied the bandages shut.

“There’s no way I would sell a named drop item so easily. I couldn’t see the item description, don’t you have an item that lets me see it?”

At my spot-on question, Loretta made a cute pout. Then, she retorted bluntly.

“... You’ve grown, customer.”

“All thanks to you.”

When I poured a potion over the bandages, the wounded area heated up and then subsided. Seeing that my HP had stopped decreasing, I nodded and looked back at Loretta. Loretta, who was watching me wrap myself in bandages, looked away at the same time that I looked up at her. I didn’t yield to her complaints and asked, “So? You have it right? How much is it?”

“Chet. It’s 100 gold.”

“Here, 100 gold.”

Even as she grumbled, she took the gold from me, returning back the Headband of Wisdom along with a scroll. I always wondered, just where was she taking these things out from?

“It’s an Appraisal Scroll. Because items dropped by named monsters aren’t registered with the dungeon, Appraisal Scrolls are needed to check their item description. With this, you can see the

description of any items! Since you can always come across cursed or magical items with unknown effects, it's best to always carry some around."

"Before using this, is it impossible to find out the headband's effects?"

"A magician with the Appraisal skill would be able to do the same thing."

I learned more good information. I followed Loretta's instruction and ripped the scroll above the hairband. Then, a translucent window popped up in front of me.

[Headband of Wisdom (Rare)

Durability – 50/50

Defense – 3

Equipment Requirement(s) – Female only

Option – Intelligence +5, Magic +5, Charm +7]

"Here, let me see. Gek."



Loretta stuck her head next to me, letting out a fragrant scent. When she saw the item description on the window, she frowned and made the sound of a frog being run over by a truck. She then murmured, “I should have bought it for 1,000 gold...”

“I wouldn’t have sold it anyways. This is good, right?”

“Setting aside the charm stat, it has the stat value of two levels. Plus, it’s an accessory. Of course it’s good.”

“It’s as I thought then. One problem though, I’m not female.”

“You can gift it to your girlfriend!”

“Loretta, are you picking a fight with me?”

Like I’d have a girlfriend! Can’t you see by the fact that I’m always in the dungeon hunting? When I shot Loretta a look of resentment, she made a sly expression and poked my shoulder. It hurt.

“What do you mean, customer? You promised to meet someone, remember?”

“Ah...”

She had to be talking about Palludia. That wasn’t funny, even as a joke. Why would I make a choice equivalent to throwing my life

in the dumpster?

However, regardless of what Loretta said, Palludia was still mad at me. If I gave her a gift, she might forgive me.

The only other female explorer I knew was Shina, but I was much closer to Palludia than Shina. Alright, then it was decided. I made up my mind to give the Headband of Wisdom to Palludia. After returning the hairband to my inventory, I talked to Loretta again.

“Loretta, I want to buy 20 Floor Master Battle Vouchers.”

“20!? T-That’s 60,000 gold!”

And it was also 102 million won. Kuk, now that I made the conversion in my head, I felt just how much money that was. However, it wasn’t such a big amount compared to how much I had.

Excluding the few items that Loretta forced on me, I never used gold or exchanged it for won. As such, they were just piled up in my inventory. For reference, the lizardmen from the 19th floor gave 170 gold for every three that I killed. It meant each of them gave over 50 gold, or 100,000 won.

“It’s fine. I still have about 500,000 gold saved up.”

It was 1 billion won.

“Amazing, customer. Just when did you get so much?”

“It must be from all those Floor Masters I hunt every day. Alright, hurry up and give them to me before I change my mind.”

“Customer, I’m seeing you in a different light. You’re a man when you want to be!”

“Just fork it over!”

I snatched the twenty battle vouchers from Loretta. Since I could only use two per day, I had bought enough to last for the next ten days. After taking the 60,000 gold from me, Loretta gave her money bag a slight look of reluctance. Then, she sighed and returned 10,000 gold to me. I received the money, confused.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s a discount, customer. Discount. Don’t you know?”

“I know what a discount is, but why?”

I could not understand why Loretta gave me such a benefit, especially given what she said about them being sold at manufacture cost. However, after handing over the gold, Loretta looked almost relieved as she replied with a light smile.

“I was a little mean last time trying to sell them at their manufacture cost. No one buys them anyways. Humans are truly too weak. Even though the dungeon guarantees to save their lives, no one dares to adventure. For hundreds of years, everyone only thought to climb higher while avoiding Floor Master battles. Even in this First Dungeon where the brave and strong have been gathered... Ah, I can't say anything more than that. Regardless, customer is a Hero I haven't seen in a while. I shouldn't be punished for supporting you this much.”

“You're saying that too, Loretta. I'm not something like a Hero. It's just that I'm not desperate right now. I can be adventurous because I'm not afraid of losing a week's worth of time.”

“Huhu, customer, you see...”

As if it was a secret, Loretta lowered her voice to near silence, bringing her lips to my ear. As I was about to tear myself away, Loretta seemed to have read my thoughts as she whispered,

“The more desperate the situation, the more necessary it is to adventure.”

I held my breath. She was right. My existence proved she was right.

I understood. Saying that the continent's in dire straits, or that every second is important. They were all nothing less than excuses. Perhaps they said that as they never had the chance to see Muscle Compressing Elixirs or Soul Tempering Pills. However, there had

to be people other than me who discovered and consumed them.

Yet, the thought of dying and wasting a week caused them to give up re-challenging the Floor Master, and they continued their climb. I, on the other hand, was different. That's how I got stronger. Although I may be weaker than them now, I would continue to grow stronger. Stronger than them. I was confident.

“Now you get it? The fruit of adventure is always sweet... Heronim.”

Loretta whispered sweetly with small teardrops hanging from her eyes. Seeing her bewitching figure, I couldn't help but gulp down a mouthful of saliva. Wait, was she...

“Are you that sad about the 10,000 gold? You shouldn't have given it to me then.”

I seemed to have hit the bull's eye, as she yelled with her teardrops flowing midair.

“Don't say it! I was trying to forget about it, but now it's on my mind again!”

“What's done is done. Thanks.”

“Uuu, meanie.”

The Floor Shop owner, Loretta, with a cute personality. It seemed the playful relationship between me and her would continue.

“Whew, alright. I’m going to start my Dark Ratman conquest today.”

“Customer, are you going for a complete conquest again?”

Complete conquest. If it referred to consuming the Thunder Crystal to the limit, collecting the Dark Ratman equipment set, and defeating the Dark Ratman alone, then my answer was clear. Although I thought over the benefits of consuming Thunder Crystals, since Loretta already confirmed the path I was walking was right, I no longer hesitated.

“Of course. See you later!”

## Chapter 25. I Can Hear Your Voice (2)

The Dark Ratman was fundamentally different from the Wraith Queen or the Orc Lord. The Orc Lord had nothing but brute strength and the Wraith Queen had a clear weakness. However, the Dark Ratman was fierce, possessing a strong attack power and a powerful skill. His minions were also nothing to scoff at.

I led a party of ten to challenge the Dark Ratman. Although we succeeded, three of us had died.

“Thank you! Thanks to Crown Prince-nim, we can finally challenge the 16th floor!”

“As expected of the One Who Leads the Path!”

“Crown Prince! Crown Prince!”

Just like the explorers from the 10th floor, the six surviving members bowed and thanked me, or chanted my name. At this rate, they might even pick me up and toss me into the air. I knew it wasn't my place to say, but if they continued climbing up by relying on others and not on their own strength, they would eventually be brought to their knees.

After saying my goodbyes, I left the boss room. Then I fell on my butt and murmured, “Whew, strong. Too strong.”

When my level was low, a small difference in stats made a big difference. However, the Dark Ratman was the Floor Master of the 15th floor, and I was level 20. Now, it seemed a difference of 5 levels was only a mere difference of 5 levels. Even though my stats were abnormally high from the Compressing Elixirs and Soul Tempering Pills, it was still not enough to make a decisive difference.

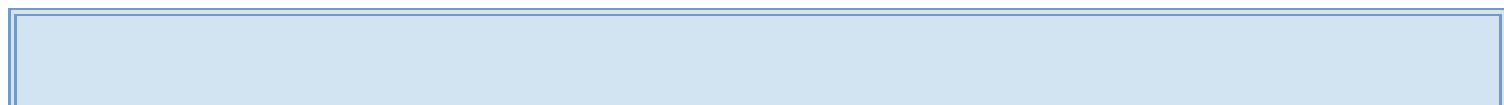
Since my stats could not overwhelm it, I could only do so by experience. I needed to read all the ratmen minions' movements and prevent the Dark Ratman from attacking me while I took care of them. I also needed the ability to escape from the Dark Ratman's fearsome skill without failure.

Of course, the goal was to let all the party members avoid it, not just me. From my experience, it was rather simple. As long as the ratmen minions were taken care of that is.

“Now! Get back!”

“Kugagagak! It's a festival of lightning!”

That bastard's way of talking was the same as ever! At my shout, the party members backed off, and the Dark Ratman's lightning only burnt through empty air. I disregarded the burning smell and charged at his body. Shining out with radiant white light, my Heroic Strike penetrated his abdomen. Now that it had become a skill, it had a wonderfully short charging time.





[Critical Hit!]

“Kugagagagak!”

As Dark Ratman cried out in its death throes, I let out a sigh of relief and looked around. One, two, three... eight, nine. Perfect. Everyone was alive.

“Oh, Crown Prince!”

“All hail Crown Prince!”

“To defeat the Dark Ratman without any casualties!”

“This is the first time I’ve heard of such a thing happening. To think I’d become the witness of history. Crown Prince...”

It took 3 days until I succeeded in defeating the Dark Ratman with all party members surviving. In other words, it had taken me 9 boss fights. Of course, with me taking the top contribution for all of them, I was able to take the Thunder Crystal 8 times and the Dark Ratman’s Leather Vest for the other.

It seemed I was getting the hang of it now. Thinking about slowly lowering the number of party members and completely destroying the Dark Ratman, I could not help but get excited like a child. As I was immersed in my thoughts, the party members suddenly pounced toward me.

“Crown Prince, Crown Prince!”

“Hey, prepare to pick him up!”

“Whooooo!”

Stop! Just go up already!

Then one day, just as I finished eating breakfast and prepared to go the dungeon, my mother stopped me.

“Shin, school starts today, right?”

“... Yes?”

“It’s September 2nd, the first day of school.”

“Ah.”

I sometimes wondered if my intelligence stat was really 20. Perhaps the dungeon was lying to me. Today was another one of those days.

When I asked Loretta about it, she said, “How can someone born with the intelligence stat of 20 be the same as someone who raised their intelligence stat to 20?” I was speechless.

It seemed this applied to not just intelligence, but also strength, dexterity, constitution, magic, and other stats. When I thought about it, it made sense. I was originally adept in using my strength and moving my body, but when I saw other explorers, I wondered why they couldn't move as well. Loretta's words had solved this mystery.

In short, raising one's stats did not immediately make one stronger. There needed to be some time to adjust. Loretta jokingly called this 'updating.'

But how could I forget the first day of school!? It had been years since I raised my intelligence stat, how could it still be updating? Was it because I didn't use my brain enough?

With mother giving me the 'don't tell me you forgot' face, I smiled bashfully.

"I've been busy with the dungeon lately."

"Dungeon this, dungeon that. Your father's been saying the thing. Do you have gold hidden in there?"

"Doesn't father bring you some every day?"

"What about you?"

“Eh? Well, I...”

I turned away from her gaze. Sorry mother, with all the gold I’m spending to meet a friend, I don’t have any to bring home. But if I told her this, I got the feeling she would cut our tie of kinship. That would be troublesome. It meant I would not be Yua’s brother anymore.

“How can I be the same as father? I don’t make as much. In fact, I spend more than I make.”

“Well, that’s what I thought. Your father, though. Why isn’t he registering as an ability user?”

Currently, father was frantically breaking through a dungeon floor. He should be on the 14th floor. As expected of the self-proclaimed Strongest on Earth, he swept through so many floors in just a few months.

I knew exactly what father was thinking.

“He’s a bit too weak right now.”

When I told her that he was raising his level and Shockwave’s skill level, she tilted her head. It seemed there was something even mother did not know.

I had no idea how an ability user developed their ability. I could only suspect that they grew with frequent use. It was also possible

that abilities could not grow. After all, if it was so easily doable, there wouldn't be so many F-rank ability users complaining on internet forums.

However, it was simple for an awakened dungeon explorer to develop his skills. He just had to repeatedly use the skill and raise its skill level. As a bonus, he could also raise his mana stat with the level up stats points, making it all the more easy for skills to develop. All in all, there was no other bug like a dungeon explorer awakening as an ability user.

When ability users awakened, they visited the government owned Ability Appraisal Center, and determined what category their ability fell into, as well as the amount of mana they held and their rank. Of course, since father did not have any plans to register as an ability user, he could only guess his rank from the power of ability users shown on TV worldwide. The result was D-rank.

F and E-rank ability users were not deployed to fights against monsters. If they were, it was only as supports. Only at the D-rank did one have the power to fight against monsters. Of course, with father's spearmanship and strength as a dungeon explorer, his real strength was well over D-rank. However, his ability itself was D-rank.

Father, who thinks he should be the strongest on Earth, jumped at the prospect of his ability being labeled D-rank, and rushed into the dungeon.

As a result of leveling up Shockwave's skill level along with his

own, he now had the strength of an upper C-rank ability user. Of course, he would continue to get stronger. Yup, I was jealous.

However, father gave up on everything like Compressing Elixirs, Soul Tempering Pills, Orc Lord Set, and titles. He focused solely on climbing higher and raising his skill levels.

Although it was a decision he made to quickly increase his strength and earn more money, I did not think it was wise. Complete conquering of the dungeon. I believed that this path I was taking was the way to infinitely grow stronger.

“So... Shouldn’t you go to school?”

“Yes, I will, Mom.”

As I regretted scheduling my first class to be at 9 A.M. in the morning, I had to walk up the school’s annoying hillside road. Seeing the ginkgo trees lined up along the path, I smiled.

“In a while, they’ll be extremely beautiful.”

Ginkgo nuts fell and exploded, their pungent odor spreading out into the air.

[Let’s do our best so more will grow next year!]

[Ehew, I’m annoyed by all these old women picking up the nuts.]

We have to give them to the Queen.]

Fall, a season wrought with the smell of ginkgos, was now coming to an end. There was less than two weeks before winter began. When the time came, I vowed to take the shuttle bus, instead of treading uphill in the cold.

The lectures happened on the 2nd floor of the business management building. It was a class with over 100 people. Somehow the students had already gotten to know each other, as they chatted like they'd known each other for years. I, on the other hand, was standing outside the door, staring at them like I was from a different country. I had the feeling that campus life I dreamed of would not be happening.

It was then that I felt a hand pulling on my sleeve. I turned around.

“Gek, hoody girl.”

“Su Ye-Eun!”

“Right, Su Ye-Eun. It was nice seeing you again.”

As I made a 180 degree turn and began to head towards a corner seat, Su Ye-Eun grabbed onto my sleeve again.

“You...”

“I still don’t know your name yet.”

Su Ye-Eun was again covering up her head with a hoody. Even so, at a close distance, her face was in full view. Round eyes, aquiline nose, and full pink lips. She had all the qualities of a beauty. Of course, even if her beauty could topple Cleopatra off her throne, I wanted nothing to do with her!



## Chapter 26. I Can Hear Your Voice (3)

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If I involved myself with her, others might find out that I'm an ability user. Even worse, the fact that I'm a dungeon explorer might be revealed. Mm, I still couldn't believe that I told Su Ye-Eun that I was a dungeon explorer. What was I thinking? I could only hope that she wouldn't sell out someone who saved her life.

"Kang Shin. Kang Shin."

"Yeah, hi."

I tried to turn away again, but this time, she held onto my arm.

"Hey, stop!"

"Why are you avoiding me?"

"Put your hand on your chest and ask yourself."

"... Pervert."

"Can I hit you just once?"

Su Ye-Eun let go of my arm then asked in an even quieter voice.

"I want to know what your ability is."

“I don’t want to know yours.”

“... Do you hate me?”

“Now you know?”

“Why?”

“You’re a bother.”

This time, she didn’t grab onto my arm. I wondered if I was too harsh, but soon told myself I wasn’t. It was because Su Ye-Eun was still following me.

“Are you picking a fight?”

“I couldn’t go to the opening party because of you.”

“So?”

“I don’t have any friends to talk to.”

“...”

Was I wrong to sympathize with her? No, I wasn’t! We were both

innocent! I suddenly felt my hostility dwindling and I let her sit in an open seat next to me. She seemed surprised at this unexpected action as she opened her eyes wide under her hood and smiled.

“Thanks.”

“... Hmph, it’s not like I did it for you. I just didn’t want to talk more.”

Ah, maybe that wasn’t the right response. I regretted inwardly. What I knew for sure was that I couldn’t fully shake myself loose of her, and that she became my first friend at college. Haa, life really didn’t turn out as one expected.

\*

I had a dream. I was shouting, but I couldn’t hear myself in the noisy background.

The sky was dark and full of storm clouds. Crimson devils filled the earth and the sky, and only she was by my side. There were comrades nearby that weren’t human, but she was the only human.

[If I told you that I love you, what would you say?]

I stopped my shouting and looked at her unbelievably beautiful face.

[I'd say that I hate you. Because I do.]

[... Nothing ever goes my way with you, huh?]

I looked lovingly at her blazing eyes. Before she obtained her ability, she set herself ablaze. After she obtained her ability, she set everything apart from her ablaze.

I held in my desire to embrace her and said,

[This isn't the end. The end won't come. Ever.]

[I'm surprised you can say that in this situation.]

[We're going to survive, XX... until the end, together.]

[And if we do?]

[Then I'll tell you I love you.]

[... Stupid Orc, acting superior.]

[XX said that! XX said that! Grr!]

I opened my eyes. It was the worst wake up I've ever had.

“H... Huh?”

My head hurt and so did my eyes. My throat was parched. Did I dream? No, I couldn't remember anything. I felt like I saw a dark sky but my head hurt when I tried to remember it. I gave up and opened the windows, letting the autumn wind tickle my hair.

[Good morning~]

[I came all the way from West Sea~]

[Ah, the smell of the sea!]

I shook my head to shake the sleepiness off. It seemed fatigue had built up from staying in the dungeon for too long. Plus, I had to go to school now too. Two weeks had passed since school started, which was enough to take its toll on me.

‘Let's not overdo it,’ I murmured to myself. Immediately after, I was preparing to fight the Dark Ratman three times in the morning. My classes were in the afternoon.

\*

[Palludia contacted me recently.]

“To meet on the 25th floor?”

[Yup. As I thought, it's because of you.]

“What do you mean it's because of me?”

[Haha, Shin, you aren't good with women, are you?]

“Oh, and you are?”

[At least more than you, friend. I have a fiancée after all.]

“Fiancée!?”

It surprised me. Ellos sounded content as he chuckled.

[Mm, yes. Well, you better hurry, friend. There's only a month left until the promised day.]

“Alright, I'll try. What floor are you on now?”

[I'm on the 24th floor. Since I'm near the end, I should be able to reach the 25th floor in time.]

“Alright, then see you on the 25th floor.”

[Yes, see you there.]

I finished my conversation with Ellos and thought back to the boss fight I just had. It was overall a success. There were three people including me and we all survived without a hitch.

However, I could not see the path ahead. I did not have the confidence to take on so many ratmen along with the Dark Ratman. I had the key to the solution, but using it would decrease my attack and defense significantly...

When I noticed the stinging gaze and turned to face it, I found Loretta staring at me intently.

“Wah!”

“Customer, why do you always leave me standing here like a fool while you exchange messages with others? Are you mistaking the Floor Shops as rest stops?”

“It isn’t? There are lots of foods to eat and a beautiful server as well.”

“I won’t fall for any lip service. Not to mention, I’m not fazed by such an obvious truth.”

“Then give me a 5 gold fruit juice.”

“Thank you, customer!”

Loretta really was simple-minded. I took the fruit juice from Loretta (it had an effect of quickly relieving fatigue), and asked her a question that suddenly popped up in my head.

“Loretta, you’re always at the Floor Shop whenever I come.”

“Of course. Isn’t it the duty of a shopkeeper to meet her customer?”

“Then what do you do when I’m not here?”

I’ve been meaning to ask it for a while. She was there on every Floor Shop I went to. I was curious what she did when I wasn’t here. Loretta answered with a chortle.

“My, customer, are you hitting on me? Not yet, it’s too early for that.”

“No, not at all.”

“... ”

“Ow ow ow.”

Loretta approached me without any change in her expression and pinched my cheeks without mercy. It hurt extremely.



“You shouldn’t tease girls like that, customer.”

“Eh? When did I... Sorry, spare me.”

Seeing Loretta bring out a double-sided axe from the back of the shop, I acquiesced. Loretta returned the axe with a humph.

“What was the question? What I usually do? That will be 500 gold, customer.”

“You cheapskate! I won’t ask!”

“Huhu, girls have many secrets, customer.”

“A secret worth as little as 500 gold?”

“You’re no fun. How will you get along with your girlfriend like that?”

“Like I said, she’s not my girlfriend.”

Loretta remained silent at my tiresome reply, and only when I was about finished with my juice did she speak out of the blue.

“You know I’m not a human, right?”

“I expected as much.”

“I am a member of a race well known for our aptitude for magic. I won’t tell you what race it is until later, though.”

“Magic?”

“Yes. Did you think you were my only customer in this dungeon?”

“... Eh? You mean you trade with other dungeon explorers as well?”

Loretta lightly nodded.

“It’s the power of magic and also the power of the dungeon. I can take pieces of my consciousness and put them in puppets, thus spreading my consciousness to countless places in the dungeon. Although I don’t trade with all dungeon explorers, I do trade with about 10 percent of the First Dungeon explorers.”

“Uk, that sounds exhausting.”

“Huhu, are you worrying about me? Don’t worry, I’m also resting in my house located somewhere in the dungeon.”

“That’s good then.”

In other words, the Loretta I was talking with was a puppet. I was truly surprised. It was something I had never considered. After all, her skin was just like a person's, her eyes were also...

“Do you want to try touching me?”

“No, it's fine.”

“As I thought, I'm scary, right?”

“Scary? What is?”

When I asked with a look of confusion, Loretta naturally answered.

“It's not normal. Being able to split one's consciousness and control puppets. Even dungeon explorers can't help but be shocked when they hear it.”

“Well, it's certainly shocking, but I don't see why it would be scary?”

“... Are you not scared of me, customer? I hate to be the one to say it, but I'm an amazing magician, you know?”

“The moment I saw you sitting in the Floor Shop of this mysterious dungeon, I knew you were someone amazing.”

“The one in front of you is nothing but a puppet controlled by a piece of consciousness. Doesn’t it disgust you?”

Disgust? I took the time to think about it. What was in front of me was a puppet with Loretta’s consciousness. It was seemingly no different than a real person. Through this puppet, Loretta cried, laughed, and got angry.

... What disgust?

“I’m not sure what I’m supposed to be disgusted by... Loretta is Loretta. Just because you are in a different form, doesn’t change the fact that you are Loretta. Isn’t that right?”

“Ah, um... mm.”

Loretta suddenly stuttered. Her cheeks were slightly red.

“Uuu. Certainly, this is how I hoped you would react, but...”

“Yes? What did you say?”

“Nothing! You can go now!”

“Mm? No, why so suddenly? Okay, I’ll leave, stop pushing!”

“Hurry up and leave!”

Loretta screamed and tried to chase me out. She was now red as a tomato.

Hm. Did I just make Loretta mad? What did I do wrong? I wasn't sure exactly what I did wrong, I told myself to apologize to her the next time I saw her. Then, I got out of the dungeon. It was now time to go to school.

## Chapter 27. I Can Hear Your Voice (4)

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She did not cry. Even when her country fell to ruin, even when her continent collapsed, even when her sister was dragged away by the Demon Lord, even when the emperor and empress committed suicide.

As the crown princess and the last surviving member of the Empire, she stood tall until the end.

[I'll come back to reclaim what is mine!]

[My lovely Crown Princess, what a shame it is to have you leave. I will await the day I see you again.]

The Demon Lord whispered to the girl in my embrace with a sly expression, then faced me and said.

[Savior, Hero. For what reason have you arrived at this fallen world?]

[Agh, you have a severe case of eighth-grade syndrome. I'm just here to save my friend.]

[... The reason I will not kill you now is-]

[Because you can't, idiot. I'm leaving. Next time I see you, the first thing I'll do is punch you in the face. Return!]

[How arrogant, Human.]

At my shout, my surroundings shone with a brilliant light and a door appeared in midair. I opened the door and stuck my middle finger out at the Demon Lord who was trying to look cool until the end.

[If you don't like it, why don't you come over to my world!?!]

\*

“... Again.”

It was another unpleasant morning. Was it because I only said I'd go easy and really didn't?

My entire body felt out of sorts and I had a splitting headache. I sat down cross-legged on my bed and initiated Peruta Circuit. Whenever my body felt out of balance, Peruta told me to use the Peruta Circuit to rebalance it.

Mana, which circulated with my body as the center, was extremely intense, but at the same time, extremely pure and dynamic in movement. Once I began to circulate it, it moved mostly by itself.

Circulating the mana inside of me and accepting the outside

mana, I spit out the impurities that had accumulated inside of me.

[Kyaa, cool prince!]

[The mana is so bright. I'm being sucked in~]

[Someone hold him!]

I knocked on my ear a few times and stretched. Today was the weekend, so I headed to the dungeon right after breakfast. It was the day I would challenge the Dark Ratman with just two people. My partner was none other than Shina.

“Are you sure? You left your party members behind. Plus, it's dangerous.”

“It's fine. We're only making small progress on the 17th floor. Plus, all the party members are busy today.”

Shina answered as if she had it prepared beforehand. On one hand, she held a round shield, and a longsword on the other. As expected of a party leader, her equipment looked good.

She would be my tank for today. She was stable and had the sense to dodge the Dark Ratman's skill. She was the best choice for a partner.

“To be honest, I'm slightly worried, but I know I'll be fine with



you, oppa!”

“Yep. Like I said, you just have to delay the Dark Ratman for a little.”

“Got it. Take good care of me!”

Exchanging messages with her from time to time, we became close enough for her to call me oppa. She was usually mature, but she also knew how to spoil herself and act affectionately. She was overall a very likable girl. Though, of course, she wasn’t a match for my Yua!

With the boss fight in front of us, she put on her Lightning Resistant Robe. I had my Wraith Queen Set on as well.

Although Orc Lord’s Warcry was a fantastic skill, even if I could ignore the Dark Ratman’s attack, just a single dark lightning would kill me. As such, it wasn’t particularly useful in the 15th Floor Master fight.

Wraith Queen Set’s Vengeful Spirit’s Wail had the effect of inflicting confusion and fear on surrounding enemies. With it, I could take care of all the ratmen minions while the Dark Ratman was stupefied.

Thus, whenever I fought the Dark Ratman, I took off the Orc Lord Set I liked and wore the Wraith Queen Set which I still felt awkward in. I also couldn’t help but shiver at the lightness of this

armor set.

However, Shina seemed to be paying attention to another side of the Wraith Queen Set.

“Wow, you look so cool, oppa.”

“M-Mm?”

“Huhu, it goes well with your handsome face. Like royalty.”

“R-Royalty... you’re flattering me too much.”

With how much I was being called Crown Prince, it would be bad if I confused myself for an actual royalty. With a bitter smile, I held up the Orc Lord’s Glaive.

“Alright, you can flatter me after the fight.”

“Got it! Let’s go!”

We stood side by side and kicked the door open. Inside, there were 40 ratmen and the Dark Ratman. It was the same as always.

I shouted at the top of my lungs.

“COME FIGHT ME!”

[You used the skill 'Provoke'! You gained the attention of nearby enemies!]

“Kigik!”

“Kugagak! Kill him!”

“Human male!”

From above, it would give anyone watching the unpleasant feeling of a bunch of rats running. While I gripped my spear tightly and prepared to use Heroic Strike, I yelled toward Shina.

“Take care of the Dark Ratman!”

“Yes!”

The Dark Ratman was among the ratmen running toward me, and Shina rushed toward it to take the aggro. Sure enough, the Dark Ratman changed target, swiping at her with its claws.

For some strange reason, the ratmen had low defense compared to their high attack. Their mental defense was even weaker. It was clear to see by how they were so easily provoked by a low-rank skill. Modifying the trajectory of my spear as I went, I included as

many ratmen as possible in my attack.

“Heroic Strike!”

Clad in white light, my spear thrust forward and slaughtered about a dozen ratmen in its path. I then wrapped mana around the spear and began to pierce the other ratmen’s throats.

“Kueek!”

“Human!”

“Haaap!”

I continually used Provoke, making sure none of them went toward Shina. By piercing the ratmen’s throats one by one, I made sure that they were dead.

“Kyak! It’s using its skill!”

“Vengeful Spirit’s Wail!”

[Kiyaaaaaa!]

Although I wanted to save it since I could only use it once a day, Shina had already been hit by the lightning. She would be able to dodge the follow up attacks if she dodged the initial lightning, but

she had no choice but to die if she was hit. Not unless I used Vengeful Spirit's Wail.

[You used Vengeful Spirit's Wail! All enemies have become confused! All enemies have become feared!]

“Kigigik! Human, too many humans!”

“Scary, dark scary!”

The surroundings had become chaotic. Some of the ratmen began to fight each other, while others fell and trembled in fear. The Dark Ratman had also canceled his skill and was fighting the nearby ratmen with reddened eyes.

“We don't have much time. Deal as much damage as you can!” I shouted as I took care of several Ratmen with Tempest. Shina seemed to have recovered from the paralysis thanks to the Lightning Resistant Robe, as she gasped for air and concentrated mana on her sword. Her mana was the same color as her eyes.

“Take this! Hornet Pierce!”

“Kueeek!”

While Shina was attacking the confused Dark Ratman, I continued to take care of the ratmen minions. With them fighting

by themselves or trembling in fear, they were completely defenseless. When I killed the last ratmen, the effect of Vengeful Spirit's Wail wore off, and the Dark Ratman once again used his skill.

“Kigigik, I will cook you until you're charred black!”

“I think you mean burn, idiot!”

[Dark Ratman uses Dark Thunder Explosion!]

It was here! The moment black lightning began to explode out from his body, Shina and I jumped back. Alright, we dodged it!

“Kugagaga!”

The Dark Ratman continuously shot out lightning in madness. Of course, we weren't just watching from the side. I drank a Mana Potion and prepared my Heroic Strike, while Shina drank a Health Potion.

“Whew, this is hard. You've always been fighting like this?”

“Yeah, well... It's coming!”

“Kugagagak! Humans!”

“Eat this!”

Seeing the Dark Ratman charge toward us the moment his skill ended, I threw my spear forward. When I felt the condensed energy on the spear, I felt an unprecedented feeling of satisfaction. At the same time, I had a feeling that my spear would hit exactly where I aimed it.

[Critical Hit!]

“Kugagagak!”

The Orc Lord’s Glaive completely pierced the Dark Ratman’s chest, coming out of his back and nailing him to the wall. Blood spurted out from the Dark Ratman’s chest as he collapsed on the ground. He was either dead or was on the verge of dying.

“A-Amazing. To pierce through a Floor Master’s defense. Ah...”

“Shina! Hurry up!”

“Ah! Yes!”

Shina and I both charged toward the Dark Ratman. Although he twitched its body, unwilling to die, Shina’s and my attack easily

finished him off.

“Haaap! Die!”

“Eit!”

“K-Kiiii!”

Hearing the last bloodcurdling shriek of his dying breath, Shina and I high-fived. We had succeeded.

[You consumed a Thunder Crystal. Your resistance to lightning increases slightly. Your affinity with lightning increases. Your magic increases by 5. It seems taking more will not have any effect.]

“Oh.”

I finished consuming Thunder Crystals to their limit much earlier than I anticipated. It was also unexpected that it would increase my magic by 5. As I was checking my status with satisfaction, Shina, who obtained the Dark Ratman's Leather Boots, looked at me with an apologetic expression.

“Is it really okay, oppa? I hear the Leather Boots are a rare part.”



“I already have it. I only need two more to complete my set.”

“A-Amazing.”

One of them would come from hunting the Dark Ratman alone, so I really only had one more to go. Once I had that one piece... I would solo the Dark Ratman. I still wasn't confident, but I had no choice.

“Good luck, oppa! Although I'm not sure what you're doing, I know oppa can do anything!”

“Haha, are you trying to cheer me up? Thanks.”

“Call me if you ever need me again. I will always be available!”

“Alright, see you again later.”

I said my goodbye to Shina who was acting cutesy with sparkling eyes.

‘Alright, I'll obtain the last piece of the Dark Ratman Set by the end of the day. Then, I'll challenge him solo tomorrow.’ I murmured, trying to ease my anxiety.

## Chapter 28. I Can Hear Your Voice (5)

---

The sky was dyed black. Under the artificial sky where not even a stream of light shone through, the dungeon, having swallowed all challengers, opened its mouth as if to seek more prey. From it, the screams of the dead and the smell of blood were still leaking out.

[Son, are you ready?]

Holding a spear over 3 meters long, he looked back at me. He was a veteran Hero, a Hero of the human race. Not just him, but all those who gathered to clear the dungeon were the same.

[Yes.]

Answering him lightly, I checked my equipment before entering the dungeon. An armor made from five-colored metal, a strange gauntlet emanating otherworldly aura, and plate boots that wouldn't melt even in lava. Finally, in my hand, a spear of pure white that rejected all darkness.

Finally.

[Sharana, Ruyue, Peika, Dortu.]

[I'm ready!]

[What? Let's just go in already. I'm ready to rampage.]

[Let's get this boring dungeon over with! Then we can go play.]

[I'm Dortu. I will follow Master's command.]

With them by my side, I would not be afraid no matter who I was up against. I gave the girls a big smile, and they also smiled back. I could do this. I was filled with confidence.

I raised the pure white spear in my hand and pointed it at the entrance to the dungeon.

[We're going in!]

\*

“...”

I woke up. I calmly raised my hand. It was my hand, the one I had seen for 19 years. I then touched my body. It was the same, wearing the same shirt I always wore as pajamas.

“Huu... Huu...”

I felt like vomiting from a splitting headache. How many times had I now seen dreams like this? I could remember at least three... five... twenty...

I could not remember the faces of people that appeared in my dreams, but I vaguely remembered our conversations or the scenery. Were the dreams from my future? No, it could be from a ruined...

[Prince-nim!]

[Ce-le-bri-ty-!]

[He smells nice.]

[Kyaa! He looked this way!]

By the slightly open windowsill, I saw the air swirling. A few masses of blue light were frolicking about. They must be the owners of the voices I'd been hearing recently and trying to ignore. These small and rowdy existences held incomprehensible powers. Elementals.

I became certain at this moment. I had awakened.

Spirit Mastery and Deific Manifestation. Was it really coincidence that I learned these two skills? I remained doubtful. At first, I thought Deific Manifestation was a skill that would allow me to learn a mana cultivation method, and I thought Spirit Mastery would only make Deific Manifestation stronger.

Now that I had awoken to my ability, these two skills had entirely different purposes. Was this by someone's design? If so, who was this someone? Was it the one who created the dungeon? Would that existence even be a person?

Things I had never thought about flooded my mind. However...

Clap!

“Alright”

As I rubbed my swollen cheeks, I returned to reality. Even if I tried to remember, I couldn't remember what I couldn't remember. I just had to do the things within my power. Then what were they?

It was to form a contract.

“There are many elementals on Earth, but I can't just go around searching for my partner.”

I realized from hearing the voices of many elementals in the past few days. Earth was full of elementals. Though, I did not know whether they were always there, or whether they appeared after Two Moon.

I slowly recalled my ability. Elementalist. If I were to call it something, that would be it. I could feel elementals, see them, and use their powers by forming contracts with them.

## Contracts.

The language for it was already prepared. Almost as if I had known it my entire life, it was ingrained into my mind. Although I felt unfamiliar with myself, I soon became numb to the feeling. I had to acknowledge what I had to acknowledge. However, I was curious as to whether all Awakened experienced the same feeling.

Of course, just because I could hear the voices of elementals and form contracts with them, it did not mean I could form a contract with any random elemental. An Elementalist could only see and form contracts with elementals on the same wavelength as the Elementalist's soul.

As the quality of the Elementalist's soul increased, he would be able to see more elementals. However, I was still a rookie Elementalist who had not formed a contract with a single elemental. The first thing I had to do was to find an elemental on the same wavelength as me.

How could I go about doing that? I, of course, couldn't travel the world searching for the right elemental. That was why the contract circle existed. It was something ingrained into my mind when I awakened as an Elementalist. It was a magic circle that connected me to the elemental whose wavelength matched mine.

First, I pushed my bed to the side, then began to draw the magic circle on the ground. I bit down on my finger, tracing the outer perimeter of the circle with blood. Then, I engraved the inside of

the circle with symbols that popped up in my head. At the same time, I imbued my mana into the symbols, giving them power.

[Look! It's a contract circle!]

[Really?]

[It's an Elementalist!]

[I've never seen one in this world before.]

[I want him to contract me! Then, I'll ask him to embrace me snugly.]

[Dream on, weakling.]

The nearby elementals seemed to have noticed what I was doing as they made circles around me. However, I ignored them completely. Although I could hear their voices, I could not clearly see their forms. It meant their wavelengths did not match mine.

I used over three hours to draw the circle. Of course, I had my door locked. I did not want to be disturbed. It was Sunday, so I did not have to worry about much.

After I finished drawing the circle, I imbued my mana into it to check that it worked properly. There was no problem.

I got down on one knee and chanted as I placed my left hand on the contract circle.

“I, Kang Shin, request the world’s help. Draw a connection between me and the one who will become my friend and strength. Let us come together like we were in the beginning of the world.”

Ooong.

As soon as I finished, the contract circle began to vibrate, radiating light. It not only sucked in my own mana, but it began to absorb the mana in the atmosphere.

[Kyaa, run! We’re being sucked in!]

[As I expected, he’s a-ma-zing-!]

[It’s the birth of an Elementalist!]

[You stupid elementals! I said run!]

Even as the elementals near me ran away in a hurry, the contract circle sucked in more and more mana. This continued for a while before it began to calm down. Then, after radiating out with a final burst of light, it calmed down completely. At the same time, I confirmed that a connection had been made between me and someone beyond the contract circle.



I whispered softly.

“Can you hear me?”

[Who... are you? This strong and familiar feeling of lightning...]

I consumed Thunder Crystals to the limit. Since my affinity to lightning increased, it was obvious that I would be connected to a lightning elemental. I continued.

“I’m Kang Shin. Who are you?”

[I am a lightning elemental, Peika. I’ve been sleeping in a place where no one could find me.]

“I found you. I want you to become my strength.”

[I am the same. I also want you who holds the power of lightning. I want the outside world.]

“Then form a contract with me.”

[Okay.]

In the next moment, the contract circle let out a resplendent light. It was so bright that I could not help but close my eyes. When I opened them, an adorable girl, whose height did not seem

to reach 20cm, was floating above the contract circle. She wore a delicate black silk dress and silk gloves, and had straight black hairs that curled at the ends.

She had snow-white skin, eyes that shone with noble gold, and appearance like a porcelain doll. It was a shame. If she were human, she would have been a girl of incomparable beauty.

She closed the folding fan in her hand with a thwack, then pointed it toward me.

[I'm here to form a contract.]

“My name is Kang Shin. In exchange for my mana, I wish to form a master-servant contract with you.”

[My name is Peika. Until the day I perish, I solemnly swear my loyalty to thee.]

In that instant, the connection between me and Peika transformed to an inseparable bond. An indescribable pleasure swept through my body. At the same time, I heard messages that I could only see in the dungeon.

[You formed a contract with the lightning elemental Peika! Your affinity with the lightning element greatly increases!]

[You obtained the class, ‘Elementalist!’ Successful 1st class

advancement increases your magic and charm by 10.]

[You obtained the active skill, 'Spirit Aura.' By infusing a weapon with one's elemental, you can increase the weapon's strength. The strength increase depends on your mana and your affinity with the elemental.]

[You obtained the passive skill, 'Elemental Contract.' As the skill levels increase, the number and quality of elementals you can form contracts with also increases. At the same time, it has a positive effect on already contracted elementals. Summoning elementals and maintaining them increases skill proficiency. Currently available number of contracts: 1]

[You obtained the class passive skill, 'Elemental Control.' You can further control your contracted elemental. You can temporarily call upon ownerless elementals in nature in exchange for your mana. As the skill level increases, you can use less mana to more strongly control more elementals. Commanding and communicating with elementals increases skill proficiency.]

### [List of Contracted Elementals

1. Peika – lightning elemental. Unique elemental. Locked. Locked. Unawakened.]

[Low-rank Spirit Mastery becomes level 4! Your affinity to all souls and spirits increase, allowing you to wield even stronger power.]

---

“Huu.”

I finally obtained a class. Although I had lingering attachment to the Spearman class, it was easy to see that Elementalist was a much rarer class. No, setting aside the matter of its rarity, I knew I could not be anything else but an Elementalist. I was certain that it was coded within my soul's essence. Was this what awakening was? Was this what becoming an ability user was? I did not know how the dungeon managed to find out and turn my ability into skills, but at this moment, I was too enraptured to care.

Elemental Contract. It allowed me to feel an existence completely different than my own, and the feeling of being able to control it allowed me to experience a drug-like ecstasy. I felt her powerful existence, and even as it scared me, I smiled. Peika floated up and came right in front me. Then, using the hand not holding the folding fan, she touched my left eye.

[I will engrave the contract symbol in Master's eye. It's going to hurt a bit, Master.]

“Kuk.”

It was a pain like stabbing one's eyes with a needle. However, the pain only lasted for an instant. When I picked up a mirror to check my eye, I was startled. The center of my iris was radiating with a golden light.

[You won't notice it unless you look closely.]

Peika grinned and spoke. I could see the symbol of our contract on her as well. A black dragon symbol was tattooed on her cheek.

“What's that, a dragon?”

[It's the creature closest to the essence of Master's soul. That's what a contract symbol is.]

“I see... Well, it's nice to meet you, Peika.”

[Nice to meet you too, Master. I don't know why, but Master has a very nostalgic scent. It's very fragrant, I like it. I hope Master can continue summoning me.]

“Yeah, that's what I plan on doing.”

If I summon an elemental and maintain the summoning, I would increase my proficiency in Elemental Contract, Spirit Mastery, and Elemental Control. This applied not only inside the dungeon, but also outside in the real world.

Although my mana would be drained continuously, that was an issue I could easily solve by periodically initiating Peruta Circuit. Peika made a happy smile and sat on my shoulder.

I put my bed back in place so that the contract circle was covered,

then stepped out of my room.

The world looked different. It was full of elementals.

## Chapter 29. I Can Hear Your Voice (6)

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[Wow, a lightning elemental!]

[It's the first time I've seen one!]

[How beautiful. She stole my heart.]

[Heart... Thief?]

[Ah, she's an Elementalist's contracted elemental!]

I could hear the chatter of elementals all around me. Their radiant souls were lighting up the world in a way I had never seen before. The noble scenery charmed me completely, leaving me speechless.

This all happened in the instant when I became aware of myself as an Elementalist. Although the elementals' wavelengths did not match mine, just knowing how many elementals there were in the world filled me with an indescribable emotion.

[Master doesn't need to look at other elementals. Master has me.]

“Haha, how reliable. But aren't you still weak?”

[T-That's... I'll get stronger soon!]

I couldn't help but smile at the sight of Peika standing on my shoulder and declaring her intentions with her folding fan held high. I knew that Peika was a strong elemental and that she would continue to get stronger. She was a unique elemental with self-awareness and a name. She also had secrets I was unaware of. However, Peika right now was still weak.

All elementals were like that. They were existences that grew stronger by continued communication with their contracted master. No elemental was strong from the moment it formed a contract. Well, there were, of course, exceptions.

In general, by spending time together, the souls of the elemental and the Elementalist became similar, thus making the elemental stronger. The speed and the limit of growth, which differed for each elemental, determined the strength of an elemental. However, they all started at the same starting line.

“Let's get along, Peika.”

[Leave it to me! I am the lightning elemental Peika!]

As I was enjoying my talk with my lovely partner, I suddenly recalled what I had planned for today.

‘One last part.’

The Dark Ratman solo. I trembled slightly. Today's circumstance



was a lot different than yesterday's. Let alone the Dark Ratman, I felt like I could defeat even the 25th Floor Master alone. With Peika's strength and Elemental Control...!

[Kang Shin-nim's contribution is the highest. Choose your reward.]

[1. Dark Ratman's Leather Vest

2. Middle Potion

3. Dark Ratman's Leather Fedora

4. 600 Gold

5. Dark Ratman's Leather Glove.]

There! I clenched my fists. If the equipment part I wanted did not drop, I would have had to fight the boss again. Thankfully, bringing four other people did the trick. Choosing the Dark Ratman's Leather Glove, I smiled.

“Wow, Crown Prince-nim already picked an item, but there are still two set items left.”

“Crown Prince-nim is truly unparalleled in boss fights.”

“He’s an Elementalist. They are people the likes of us can’t begin to comprehend.”

“How come I’ve never heard of Crown Prince-nim being an Elementalist?”

“He must have been hiding it.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Like I said, Elementalists are people we can’t comprehend.”

As my party members were writing a novel of their own, I confirmed the six Dark Ratman set equipment. Because weapons did not count towards the set, I never chose the Dark Ratman’s Claw. The Wraith Queen Set had six parts to it, but it seemed the Dark Ratman Set would have seven.

What I had now was the Dark Ratman’s Leather Fedora, Dark Ratman’s Leather Vest, Dark Ratman’s Leather Belt, Dark Ratman’s Leather Glove, Dark Ratman’s Leather Pants, and finally, Dark Ratman’s Leather Boots. Since it was unlikely that a shirt would be made out of leather, I suspected the last one would be a leather jacket. I was about to find out.

“Good work everyone. I’ll be leaving now.”

“Thank you, Crown Prince-nim! As expected of a Hero!”

“An Elementalist, I’m so jealous. I hope to see you on the 20th floor too!”

‘That probably won’t happen. By the time you’re on the 17th floor, I’ll have long since left the 20th floor.’ Of course, I didn’t let my thought escape my mouth. Wishing them good luck, I left the boss room. On the other side was Loretta, who I was seeing for the first time today.

“C-Customer?”

“Yes.”

“Um, on your shoulder...”

Eh? She could see Peika? Although Elementalists could let others see their elementals, I had not done so. This could only mean that she was an Elementalist whose wavelength matched Peika, or...

[Faerie race! It’s the first time I’ve seen a member of the Faerie race!]

Peika shouted in surprise when she saw Loretta. With my guess having been confirmed, I nodded my head. The Faerie race, a mystical race that was represented by the well-known elves, fairies, hobgoblins, and dwarves. Although elementals could be considered true faeries, they were different from elves or dwarves

who had settled down on the material world.

Members of the Human race could not wield mana, or the select few that could had to learn it through their own efforts. However, members of the Faerie race were born with the ability to wield mana. Although they had their shortcomings, in terms of their magical abilities they were unparalleled.

Of them, the Elves had the greatest affinity with mana and elementals. Whether they could form contracts with them or not, they were born with Elemental Eyes, which allowed them to see elementals.

It seemed Loretta was a Faerie, and an elf at that. I imagined that an elf would have long, pointy ears, but since she said her form was a puppet she created, she must have hidden her racial features.

But how could she see elementals with through her puppet? Ah, I see. It was an ability rooted in the mind, not the body.

... Wait, how did I know all this? Was it part of the knowledge ingrained into me when I became an Elementalist?

“Customer, you became an Elementalist! Wow, that was unexpected!”

“That... doesn’t sound like a compliment.”

“I mean, a few years ago, you were muscle-brained and muscle-

bodied! If anybody said you would become an Elementalist... a hellhound passing by would laugh.”

“I wouldn’t want to be in a place where a hellhound is randomly passing by anyways!”

[You, did you ridicule Master?]

When Peika glared at Loretta and asked, Loretta shook her head with a smile.

“Elemental-nim, customer and I share a special relationship. We were just having a friendly conversation.”

[Hmph, I don’t like you. Not to mention, you’re hiding in a puppet.]

With a humph, Peika snorted and turned away. As I gently rubbed Peika’s head, I talked to Loretta.

“I’ll be back. It shouldn’t take long.”

Loretta seemed to have understood what I meant as a faint smile flickered around her mouth.

“Good luck. I’ll pray for your safety.”

“Thanks.”

I inspected my Wraith Queen Set one last time and made sure I had all sorts of potions ready on my body. Finally, I patted Peika on the head.

[I’m not a child!]

Although Peika shouted and puffed out her cheeks, she did not refuse my patting. How cute. I already knew what she thought with the connection we shared.

I stood in front of the door I just closed. With my spear in hand, I kicked it open.

“Kugaga! Human, a human!”

“Tasty looking human!”

“I’ll turn you all into rat meat steaks!”

[You used the skill, Provoke! You draw nearby enemies toward you!]

‘Not that I’d eat it.’ Thinking rather useless things, I charged forward, paving forth a way with my spear.

“Peika, I’ll leave it to you!”

[Got it!]

As I swung my spear amongst the sea of ratmen, Peika calmly flew up. Then, as if to make fun of the ratmen attempting to block her way, she leisurely flew past them and towards the Dark Ratman.

Although the rattled Dark Ratman tried to attack her, she was a lightning elemental. As a wind elemental was swift, as a water elemental was soft, as an earth elemental was sturdy, and as fire elemental was hot, she, as a lightning elemental, was fast and sharp.

“Little fly, kugagak, I’ll crush you!”

[F-Fly? You dare compare this noble lightning elemental to a fly!? I’ll kill you!]

I could feel mana draining out of me. Peika had taken it to manifest her elemental lightning. Although the Dark Ratman had its black lightning, it seemed the elemental lightning attack worked, as it let out a pain-filled shriek. Good. It seemed I could leave the Dark Ratman to her.

Feeling an infinite trust in my elemental, I drank a Lowest-grade Mana Potion, and focused again on the ratmen in front of me. I

continued to use Provoke to draw them near me, then used Vengeful Spirit's Wail.

“Kiyaaaa!”

[You used Vengeful Spirit's Wail. All enemies within its area become confused and feared!]

The gathered ratmen made vacuous expressions and began to roll around on the floor or attack each other. It was now! I raised my spear up high.

“Elementals!”

[Prince is calling!]

[What do we do? What do we do?]

[Ugly rats, ew.]

“Come to my spear! Together, we'll exterminate those ugly rats!”

[Whoo, I'm first!]

[Whee~]



What I prepared was Tempest. At my calling, the nearby elementals let out small lights as if to assert their existences and flew toward my spear. Along with Peruta Circuit's flow of mana, a spiral current formed around my spear and the elementals naturally began spinning along the current.

[Fun! It looks fun!]

[Me too, me too!]

[Put me in too!]

No matter how faint the lights were, when they gathered together in mass, the spear was radiating with bright light. If Heroic Strike shone with a pure-white radiance, then the countless elementals on my spear shone it with a festival-like rainbow.

In front of such beautiful sight, I almost forgot to attack. However, I soon remembered what situation I was in due to the elementals slowly draining my mana.

“Here I go, Tem-”

No, this was different from the Tempest Peruta had taught me. My technique as a spearman and strength as an Elementalist. It was a technique that embodied my identity.

“Here I go, Elemental Tempest!”

## Chapter 30. I Can Hear Your Voice (7)

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“Here I go, Elemental Tempest!”

Shouting out the name that suddenly crossed my mind, I thrust out my spear clad with the enormous elemental storm. As always, my naming sense was rather simple.

[Critical Hit!]

“Kuaaaak!”

“Kigik, Kuak!”

Immediately afterward, I staggered as dizziness swept over me. I had lost too much mana in an instant. I bit down on my cheek to rouse myself, and quickly took out and gulped down a Middle Mana Potion.

1,000 mana slowly filled me up, soothing my dizziness. Middle Mana Potions were sold at the Floor Shop for 500 gold. In other words, they were each worth one million won. Although I would have preferred to save them, now was not the time. The Dark Ratman was still alive and kicking.

I raised my head to see the result of my attack. What I saw was shocking. The dungeon’s stone floor was a mess as numerous holes

were scattered about. The ratmen that once filled the room were all dead, torn to shreds. Although I had somewhat expected it, it was still a surprising sight to behold.

At that time, I heard a message that I had heard once before.

[You created the skill, 'Elemental Tempest'! A technique that combines elemental power with the ancient spear technique designed to handle many enemies. It possesses a domineering force, obliterating nearby enemies! It uses half of the user's MP. This skill may only be used by its creator. The skill level is adjusted to lower-rank level 5.]

[You created a skill! Elemental Tempest is a skill that never existed elsewhere. Created with the most exquisite combination of mana, spearmanship, and elemental power, this skill will remain a legend for future generations of Elemental Spearman. You obtained 1 skill point as a reward. Current skill point: 4]

“Ha, hahaha.”

I created another skill! An indescribable feeling of satisfaction swept over me.

Attack skill.

Shina's Hornet Pierce was considered an extremely rare skill. Attack skills were as rare as magic, and would serve its user for his or her entire life. As such, I was surprised I would create a second attack skill after Heroic Strike.

Not to mention, one was a single-target attack perfect to use against a boss, and the other was a multi-target attack perfect for fighting mobs. With these two, I would be invinci... no, wait.

‘I could apply elemental power to Heroic Strike too!’

Of course, Heroic Strike was different from Tempest. It was easy to harmonize elementals with Tempest because it used a current made from mana. However, Heroic Strike was a pure concentration of my energy. If other elementals interfered, it would become weaker instead.

However, that did not mean I could not make use of elemental power. Spirit Aura. If I infused my spear with Peika, it would be possible. How strong would that be? Luckily, I did not need to imagine its strength.

I could just test it now.

“Kugagak! I will fry you along with your wings!”

[You wish!]

When all of its minions died, the Dark Ratman became noticeably

anxious. It tried to use Dark Thunder Explosion, but Peika was none other than a lightning elemental. She absorbed the Dark Ratman's paralyzing electric shock and let out an even more dazzling light.

It was to be expected. Elementals had a 100 percent resistance against their own elements. In other words, they were completely immune to their own elements. Now that I saw Peika, however, it seemed she had an absorption ability as well. Although I suspected it when I first read the information about her, but it really seemed Peika was not an ordinary elemental.

“Kahahaha! It's a festival of lightning!”

[Try it, I dare you!]

As Peika fearlessly taunted the Dark Ratman, I escaped Dark Thunder Explosion's area of effect. Even if Peika was immune to it, that did not mean I was immune as well. It might be different if Peika developed further and our affinity rose to the extreme, but that was not the case now.

As expected, Dark Ratman's black lightning was absorbed by Peika the moment it came out, and she let out an increasingly dazzling light. When the skill finally ended, the Dark Ratman panted and screamed.

“Kugagak! Tough fly!”

[Stop calling me that, you rat!]

“Kugagaga!”

The Dark Ratman’s physical resistance was close to zero with its leather burnt from Peika’s endless lightning attacks. It had exhausted its mana with Dark Thunder Explosion as well. As it was now, it was no different than a sandbag.

“Huu. Hap!”

The Dark Ratman was exhausted to the point it could not even shoot out a single bolt of lightning. However, it swung its long claws in the air in attempt to attack Peika. Meanwhile, I charged toward the Dark Ratman. Although it noticed before long, I was prepared.

“Peika, stop his movements!”

[Eit!]

At my command, Peika let out a cute shout and raised her hand toward the Dark Ratman. Parts of the lightning that danced around her shot forward toward the Dark Ratman, paralyzing it. I knew she was my elemental, but she really was perfect.

“Now, Spirit Aura!”

At the same time I activated my skill, Peika turned into a small particle of light and got sucked into my spear. I could feel my spear vibrating like it was alive and breathing. Above the spear, white lightning flickered about.

[Tell me in advance before you use it!]

“Sorry, I was in a hurry!”

Peika’s lightning could not paralyze the enemy for long yet. I could not afford to waste the precious opportunity she created. Within that short period of time, I tensed my muscles and squeezed out all the strength and mana into one point on my spear. Then, I thrust out.

“Heroic Strike!”

“Kugagagak! Kak!”

I targeted the left side of its chest where its heart was located. Lightning rippled and white light radiated out as my spear burnt its leather to crisp, broke its muscles and bones, and penetrated its heart.

The Dark Ratman shrieked as it coughed up blood. Before long, its head drooped down. It was dead.

I couldn’t believe it even after I did it myself. No matter how much Peika’s lightning had drained its energy, I had just defeated a



Floor Master in a single blow. So this was the power of an Elementalist! This was the power of an Awakened!

Even though it was mine, I was scared that I would become addicted to this power, that I would neglect my martial arts training. I had to remind myself.

‘My strength lies in my spearmanship honed through 10 years of hard work. Never forget it. Don’t become drunk on this new power.’

Then, as always, I was flooded with messages.

[A Grand Achievement! You defeated the Floor Master, Dark Ratman, alone! Amazing!]

[You obtained the title, ‘Dark Ratman Slayer.’ All stats permanently increase by 1. This effect will apply even if the title is not equipped.]

[You defeated the Dark Ratman alone. You obtained the special reward, ‘Dark Ratman’s Leather Jacket.’]

[You obtained 5,000 gold.]

[Choose your reward.]

“Whew.”

Only after I heard the flurry of messages did I relax. Although I felt like collapsing on the floor, I held on and first deactivated Spirit Aura. Having returned to her elemental form, Peika sat down on my head and pulled on my hair here and there.

[Next time, tell me beforehand! It was scary suddenly being sucked in like that!]

“Yeah, sorry, Peika.”

[Okay! I forgive you!]

Peika seemed to have been appeased as she gently stroked the hair she was pulling. Perhaps it was because she was an elemental, but she was extremely pure. Absent-mindedly, I went over the message log.

The Dark Ratman Slayer title was something I expected to get. Having defeated the third Floor Master alone, all stats were now increased by 3. No matter how small it seemed, piled up over a long time, it would have a significant effect.

And as I expected, I received the last part of the Dark Ratman Set, the leather jacket. I suspected that this equipment set had that

skill. If so, I would gladly replace the Orc Lord Set I spent a long time to gather. Of course, I was currently wearing the Wraith Queen Set.

I took off the Wraith Queen equipment one by one. Leaving behind just the shirt, I put on the Dark Ratman equipment. After wearing the leather pants, leather boots, and leather belt, I wore the leather glove, put my the leather jacket, and pushed the leather fedora on my head.

Although they were heavier than the Wraith Queen equipment, they were lighter than the Orc Lord equipment. Although I was worried that the Dark Ratman Set's defense would pale in front of the armor-type Orc Lord Set, the equipment dropped by the 15th Floor Master were fundamentally different.

When I finished putting on the last equipment part, a fanfare rang out in my ear.

‘What was that? I never heard something like it when I got the Wraith Queen’s skill!’

The messages that followed made me freeze in place.

[You equipped the Dark Ratman Set. Your strength and dexterity increases by 10. When the Dark Ratman set is equipped, you can use ‘Dark Thunder Explosion’ once per day.]

Up to this point, it was within my expectation. Still, it made me dance in happiness. I could now use that powerful skill! Like the Orc Lord's Warcry and Vengeful Spirit's Wail, equipment-based skills did not use mana.

Even though they could only be used once a day, being able to use such powerful skills without mana was a great merit.

What surprised me was what followed.

[You satisfied the opening condition of 'Collector's Pocket Watch.' You obtained a subclass! Opening condition: learn 5 skills, collect 3 skill equipment, create 1 skill.]

[You obtained the subclass, 'Skill Collector.' Your magic and luck increases by 10 through class advancement bonus.]

[You obtained the class active skill, 'Endow Skill.' You can extract skills from equipment and endow the pocket watch with them. The skills will then be useable without having the equipment set equipped. You can endow up to 12 skills and they will be usable once per day. This skill has no level.]

[You obtained the class passive skill, 'Spirit of the Collector.' Upon defeating Floor Masters or Event Dungeon bosses, or clearing Event Dungeons, the chances of items you need appearing on the reward list increases. The chance increases based on your charm and luck stat. This skill has no level.]

“Ah.”

The pocket watch. I had forgotten about it! I didn't even remember when I got it in the first place!

# Chapter 31. From Today, I'm An Official Explorer (1)

---

Since I had already gotten the Elementalist class, I had forgotten about it. I left the pocket watch stuffed into my inventory and never looked at it. But to think it would turn out like this. As always, the best feeling came from unexpected gains.

More importantly, it was a subclass. Unlike the Elementalist class, it did not grant me any amazing abilities that changed the way I fought. That said, it would have been weird if my class changed from Elementalist to something else. Being able to use Orc Lord's Warcry, Vengeful Spirit's Wail, and other equipment set skills without having to equip them was certainly beneficial.

Not to mention, the class passive skill 'Spirit of the Collector!' Although this skill seemed to rely on luck for the most part, it was clear that the skill would not be harmful in any way. As a passive skill, it would help me for a long time.

After organizing my thoughts, I hurriedly took out the pocket watch. The pocket watch was shining with dazzling light from the jewels on the lid. It was as if a switch had been turned on.

The moment I opened the lid, the minute hand, which was between 11 and 12 o'clock positions, suddenly began spinning. At the same time, I heard a voice in my ear.

[You used the skill, 'Endow Skill.' You currently possess 3

skill equipment. Which of them would you like to endow?]

- [1. Orc Lord's Warcry
2. Vengeful Spirit's Wail
3. Dark Thunder Explosion]

"Wow."

Although it wasn't like I had doubted it, but I could not help but smile seeing it with my own eyes. Without erasing the smile from my face, I spoke out.

"Orc Lord's Warcry."

[Designate the hour.]

"Hour? Ah, it's asking where. Then 1 o'clock."

As soon as the word left my word, the Orc Lord Set flew out of my inventory and fell on the ground. Then, the Orc Lord Set began to shine with red light. Soon, a red jewel flew up amidst the red light and went into the pocket watch.

Thinking I was being attacked, I almost let go of the pocket watch. But seeing that I was unhurt, I turned my gaze toward the pocket watch. The spinning minute hand had stopped and was now fixed on the 1 o'clock position. A red jewel was embedded there, replacing the number 1.

I now realized that these holes weren't actual holes where something came off. They were empty sockets where skills would be embedded.

“Vengeful Spirit’s Wail.”

Like before, the Wraith Queen Set shone with a gloomy grey light and spit out a grey jewel. It then entered the 2 o'clock socket. I continued with the Dark Ratman Set, which went into the 3 o'clock socket. For some reason, however, the jewel was yellow. Was it because lighting was yellow? But it's called dark thunder... how mysterious.

“Hu, so this means I don't need to wear the full set anymore. Though, since the Dark Ratman Set is the best, I'll continue wearing it.”

It increased my strength and dexterity by 10 points each. That was a stat bonus equivalent to 4 whole levels! The Dark Ratman was comparatively difficult to solo, but I had also gained a lot from doing so. Feeling all around happy, I smiled from ear to ear as I patted Peika's head.

[Stop, my hair will get tangled.]



Since Peika said it while flushing her cheeks and twisting her body, I continued to pat her.

Hm? Why did I feel like I was forgetting something?

“Oh yeah, the reward.”

The reward from defeating the Floor Master alone. I had almost forgotten about it. When I checked, it was a Return Magic Book. Return? Tilting my head, I used it immediately.

[You learned the Return skill. Using 80 percent of your remaining mana, you can teleport to any predetermined location. You can bring up to two people. You can only choose two locations at any given time, and you must have visited these locations before. You can only use this skill twice a day. You can change these locations every two weeks. The number of locations and the number of times Return can be used will increase with levels.]

[You cannot bring non-dungeon explorers to the dungeon.]

[You cannot bring those belonging to other worlds into your own.]

‘Geez, why is there so many twos!? It’s easy to memorize at least.

Wait, now that I think about it, this skill...’

“It’s... amazing.”

There was no better skill for going to and from school! Imagining myself teleporting to the school and teleporting back as soon as classes ended, I could not hide my excitement.

‘Ah, going from school to home should be easy since I can just go into the restroom, but the other way would be hard... I’ll need to look for a secluded area at school. Well, I’ll think about this later.’

[Name: Kang Shin Race: Human Sex: Male

Class: Elementalist (Sub – Skill Collector) Title: Dark Ratman Slayer Rank: Bronze 1

Level: 20

HP – 5,870/5,870 MP – 3,860/3,860

Strength – 55(+15) Dexterity – 49(+13) Constitution – 59(+3)

Intelligence – 20(+3) Magic – 74(+3) Charm – 43(+3) Luck – 20(+3)

Normal Skill – Mid-rank Martial Arts (Lv 9), High-rank Spear Technique (Lv 4), Peruta Circuit (Lv 3), Mid-rank Heroic Strike (Lv 2), Low-rank Provoke (Lv 7), Return (Lv 1), Deific Manifestation.

Class Skill – Low-rank Spirit Mastery (Lv 5), Low-rank Spirit Aura (Lv 1), Low-rank Elemental Control (Lv 1), Low-rank Elemental Contract (Lv 2), Low-rank Elemental Tempest (Lv 5)

Subclass Skill – Endow Skill, Spirit of the Collector]

Huu. Now that I looked at my status, one thing stood out in particular. It was that my highest stat was magic. It was because I received bonus magic stats when I became an Elementalist and a Skill Collector.

Of course, since magic could strengthen spear techniques, it was not a bad thing. Other close-combat classes most likely received bonus strength, dexterity, or constitution stats. But the compressing elixirs I consumed easily covered that difference. Not to mention, the bonus from the Dark Ratman Set should have made me surpass them. I knew for certain that equipment that raised strength and dexterity by 10 were rare.

When I visited the Floor Shop afterwards, Loretta was smiling without saying anything. Even when I showed her my sparkling pocket watch, she seemed to have expected it as she maintained her tranquil smile. Her leisure irritated me for no apparent reason.

“So you’ll be challenging the 20th Floor Master next.”

“Yes, although I won’t go for a complete conquer until I’m level 25.”

At my words, Loretta seemed to ponder over something, then said, “Customer, the 20th Floor Master, Lizard Knight, is a monster that separates the Bronze rank and the Silver rank. It is a cruel and formidable monster that slaughters explorers who do not meet the qualifications to rise to the Silver rank.”

“Is that so? But why are you telling me this?”

“For customer, it might be easier to defeat the Lizard Knight than the Dark Ratman.”

“Why is that?”

Loreta stayed silent for a moment before she opened her mouth again.

“Customer, if the Dark Ratman appeared with a stronger defense, but without its ratmen minions, what would you have done?”

“I probably could have defeated it at level 15. I would just have to dodge its skill.”

There was only one reason the Dark Ratman fight was so hard. It

was because of how difficult it was to fight the fierce ratmen minions while dodging the Dark Ratman's lightning. But if there were no ratmen minions to worry about, defeating the Dark Ratman would have been easy. In fact, it might have been easier than the Wraith Queen fight. No matter how much its defense increased, it would not stand a chance against my skills. I just had to use it a couple more times.

But at my answer, Loretta became speechless and stared at me fixedly. When I gave her the 'why are you looking at me' face, she cleared her throat and continued.

"That's exactly how the Lizard Knight is. He does not have any minions that fight for him. However, he is strong, fast, and robust. With these qualities, he has forced countless explorers to kneel and despair. But if customer is confident, it would be fun to challenge him alone."

"Dare to adventure. That's what you're saying, right?"

"Do you remember what I told you? That the fruit of adventure is always sweet."

Loretta was giving me a hint. But what did she mean by the fruit of adventure being sweet? The title of Lizard Knight Slayer should be the same no matter when I earned it. What difference was there in getting it now or later?

Ah.

“Don’t tell me, there’s a difference if I succeed in a solo raid in my challenge?”

“Who knows? Hwi hwi~!”

Loretta avoided my gaze as she whistled. It was obvious to the point it was doubtful, but Loretta had never said anything to put me at a disadvantage. She did try to con me into buying more items though.

... Could I trust her?

“One more thing, customer.”

As I was wondering whether a mere level 20 adventurer like me should try to do something that doesn’t seem particularly appealing, Loretta added, as if to put the nail on the coffin.

“The ‘first’ is always special.”

The first. I felt a strong attraction to that word. It also implied that I had never truly been the first. Being the idiot that I am, I felt my pride being provoked. Even her eyes seemed to be saying ‘you can’t even do this?’

“Alright, I’ll do it. The first.”

Loretta stared into my eyes for a moment before flushing her

cheeks and turning away. Then, she shouted as she took something out of her pocket.

“Then here’s an offer from the Floor Shop, customer! This here is a magical item that holds down the enemy’s movement for 5 seconds! Now it’s only 10,000 gold!”

“I’m not buying it.”

“Why!?”

I’ll challenge it. At level 20, I will solo the 20th Floor Master! Without that magical item, of course!

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Author’s note: Mastered lower-ranked skills have been removed from that status to avoid cluttering!

## Chapter 32. From Today, I'm An Official Explorer (2)

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Trusting Loretta's words, I stood in front of the door to the 20th Floor Master and ignored the recommendation to find a party. I put my hand on the door, but soon took it off again. No matter how easy Loretta said the Lizard Knight would be, if I went in blindly, I might face the same situation as I had with Orc Lord 4 years ago.

Instead, I sent somebody a message. Thankfully, he was in the dungeon.

“Ellos.”

[Oh, Shin. What's up?]

“I want to ask you about the Lizard Knight.”

[Wow, you're already on the 20th floor? Amazing. You might really end up meeting us on the 25th floor.]

“Of course I will. More importantly, tell me about Lizard Knight's fighting style or skills.”

Normally, I learned these things through experiencing them directly. But now, I was in a situation where I had to defeat it on my first try. Since Loretta guaranteed a hefty reward, I had to



defeat it even if I had to break my usual style.

[You usually don't ask these things. I wonder what happened. Well, I'll tell you anyways. Lizard Knight appears alone unlike the other Floor Masters, and wears a set of scaled armor made from its own scales. With it, he has a truly formidable defensive power. He uses an incredibly swift and powerful spear. If anyone who's not a tank is hit by it, they will most likely be half killed.]

“Hm, fast and powerful...”

[And if a lot of people jump at him at once, he suddenly swipes with his tail. This attack has a bigger range than you'd think. Not to mention, it hurts incredibly. Watch out for it.]

“Actually, that seems like something I can exploit. What else?”

[Oh, yeah. When he feels like he's at a disadvantage, he strikes down on the ground with his spear. The ground then rumbles and a huge damage is dealt to all explorers touching the ground. You need to dodge this one for sure.]

“He strikes down on the ground with his spear? So I can just dodge it by jumping?”

[Yep. But if you do, he immediately attacks you with a spear thrust, so be careful.]

“Alright. What else?”

[After that attack, he uses a skill called Dragon Skin. His body becomes red and incredibly tough. For the next 5 minutes, no attack will work on it. The worst part is that he continuously strikes down on the ground in that state.]

“That does sound bad. Wait, his armor gets harder too?”

[Yep. That’s what makes it so troublesome. Neither physical nor magical attacks work when he’s in that state. But if you last long enough for Dragon Skin to end, your victory is mostly secured. Because when Dragon Skin runs out, he’s exhausted. All the party members can just throw out their attacks and kill it.]

“How many tries did it take you?”

[... 7 tries. For the record, that’s considered outstanding. It’s even considered good if you defeat him in 20 or 30 tries.]

“Haha, thanks. I’ll contact you again once it ends.”

[Kuk, you mean you have the confidence to beat him on your first try. Alright, we’ll see.]

I ended my conversation with Ellos and grinned. It tooks Ellos 7 tries with a party of 10 to defeat the Lizard Knight. He would never expect that I’d try to defeat the lizard alone.

[Master can do it! Because I'm here!]

“Yeah, I can do it. Because Peika is here.”

I formed a plan based on what Ellos told me. After checking over it multiple times, I nodded my head and boldly opened the door.

“Fight me, Lizard Knight!”

“... A human.”

The Lizard Knight was standing alone in the spacious room. He was about 2.3 meters tall, and as Ellos said, on top of his scaled body was a set of full body armor made from its own scales. In its hand was a 5 meter long spear with a razor sharp head.

“You are challenging me alone? This is a first.”

“Yeah, I am.”

I smiled at him. He was trying to look cool unlike the other Floor Masters, but to me, he was no different.

When I first heard Ellos's description of him, I was nervous. I had once imagined what would happen when monsters, who were born strong, took the time to train in martial arts. However, that wasn't the case for the Lizard Knight.

In fact, he fell below my expectations. I could tell from the fact that he had not taken even the most basic stance. It was likely the result of easy growth from his natural-borne strength. How foolish.

‘I’ll show you what a truly spearman is.’

I held my spear up and took my stance.

“Peika, can you go inside?”

[I like the way you asked!]

At the same time Peika nodded her head looking pleased, I activated Spirit Aura. She was sucked into my spear in an instant, and my Orc Lord’s Glaive began to flicker with sparks. ‘You worked hard too. I’ll let you rest soon.’

“You, you’re a spearman. Great.”

“Yes, it’s great. Great indeed.”

I was father’s one and only disciple. No matter how busy I was as a dungeon explorer, as father’s son, I often had friendly matches with rising stars in Korean martial arts. Father ran a dojang that was in name only, and one of the only times we actually used it was when we held friendly competitions.

I didn't know anything about the validity of father's claims as being undefeated or strongest on Earth.

However, I knew that I had never lost in a formal match.

“Haap!”

“Die!”

When I charged at the Lizard Knight, he opened his vertically slit pupils wide and thrust out with his spear fiercely. However, the spear Ellos described as swift was lackluster, almost like the swing of a baby. I easily dodged his attack and stabbed the center of his armor.

“Kuk! For a human, you aren't so bad!”

“This is the 5th time I've heard that since I came to the dungeon, Lizardman!”

Even as I retorted, I continued to attack. Repeatedly stabbing his armor with my spear, I made sure that the shock damaged him. Realizing what situation he was in, the Lizard Knight tried to step aside, but I followed his movements tightly and continued to attack.

Although I knew my attacks would not pierce his skin, I knew Peika's lightning was effective. Electric sparks flickered on his armor, slowly breaking it.

“Kuk! Human, you were an Elementalist! You tricked me!”

“I said I was a spearman, I never said I wasn’t an Elementalist!”

“Kuhaaaap!”

He let out a rough shout as it swung forward with his spear. Of course, that was within my expectations. I ducked in a hurry, and ran forward into him. At the same time, my spear was shining out with white light.

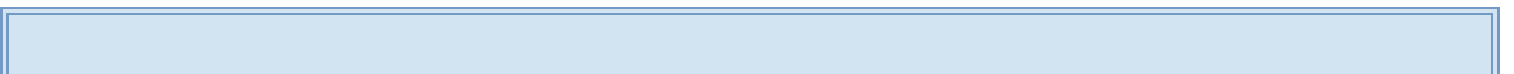
“Heroic Strike!”

“Kuk!”

Parts of his armor broke off and flew into the air. The Lizard Knight himself also flew back and hit the wall. When I was about to run after him, he seemingly ignored the shock from hitting the wall as he stood tall and spit out blood. At least he knew how to look cool.

“Kukuku, not bad. To think you could drive me into a corner like this...”

“Stop blabbering and come! I’ll show you my strength!”



[You used Orc Lord's Warcry! All party members are cleansed of negative status effects. All party members' attack power increases by 50 percent for the duration. All party members become super-armored, unfazed by enemy attacks.]

"Kuk, what is this loud noise!?"

"Good question."

As I approached him, I shouted.

"Dark Thunder Explosion!"

"Kuk!?"

Black lightning shot out from my body and struck the Lizard Knight. Although it tried to jump back in surprise, having taken the initial hit, it could no longer dodge the attack.

"Die!"

Although I did not think it would die with just this, I shouted out in hopes that it would. Immediately afterwards, countless bolts of lightning shot out from my body enough to block out my vision. Even with Floor Master's sturdiness, it seemed impossible to endure an attack of such scale as the Lizard Knight screamed out in pain.

“Kuaaak! W-What’s this!?”

“It’s my skill. Eat up!”

Even though I had never lost a formal match, this was the dungeon. It was natural to fight the explorer’s way!

Dark Thunder Explosion was truly powerful. Perhaps it was because of the 50 percent boost from Orc Lord’s Warcry, but when the Lizard Knight emerged after being swept by the flood of lightning, its armor was almost entirely worn out. In addition, I could see blood spurting out from parts of its body.

“Kuk, Human! I won’t forgive you!”

‘Eh? He’s already using it?’

The Lizard Knight raised his spear up high and struck down. It was the earthquake attack. What followed would be Dragon Skin. Ellos said I just had to endure for 5 minutes.

‘You’re wrong, Ellos.’

“Tempest!”

I shot out Tempest, aiming at its spear. Almost in an anticlimactic way, Tempest forced Lizard Knight to drop his spear.



In an instant, the Lizard Knight made a panicked expression.

This was a chance. A chance to beat it to death.

“Die!”

I did not need to use any skills. While he stood blankly in place, I stabbed forward with my lightning clad spear. First, I destroyed the armor that barely hung on his body. Then, before he could snap out of his daze, I crushed his knees and his right arm.

As I swung my spear at his left arm, he cried out in pain and used Dragon Skin, blocking my attack. However, it was too late. Three of his four limbs were no longer in a state to fight.

‘See, Ellos, it’s as I thought.’

If he knew the Lizard Knight would use Dragon Skin after the earthquake attack, why would he just leave it to use it freely? I knew from my own experience with using skills that they had clear openings.

As such, before I used any of my skills, I made sure to put myself in the super-armor state with Orc Lord’s Warcry, or to immobilize the enemies with Vengeful Spirit’s Wail, or to be at a good distance away from the enemies. If I could not do any of the above, I made sure to mix in my skill with my normal attacks as well as possible to ensure I was safe from counterattacks. Of course, even with all that, I could not say I was 100 percent safe. That was the nature of

skills.

Although the skills Floor Masters used were extremely powerful, they had their moment of weakness. And as long as there was even a single weakness, I could exploit it. In truth, it was shocking that someone like Ellos failed to see through it. It seemed I needed to tell him about it later.

“Kuk, you! I will kill you! Try attacking me!”

After activating Dragon Skin, the Lizard Knight flashed his crooked teeth and provoked me. With a snort, I picked up its spear and threw it far away. Then, I deactivated Spirit Aura and threw my spear down.

“Human?”

“I’m a martial artist. I don’t just know spearmanship.”

Of course, I didn’t tell it that I learned martial arts because I liked the feeling of beating people up with my bare hands!

## Chapter 33. From Today, I'm An Official Explorer (3)

---

There was a technique developed around the principle of using an attacker's energy against him. It was jujitsu. Spearmanship was a martial art that hurt the opponent regardless of whether the spearhead had a blade or not. As such, my family also passed down a jujitsu technique to neutralize opponents without hurting them.

In truth, it was a modified version of Japanese judo, and thus shared many similarities. Although it also took from several other close-quarter martial arts, judo was the main martial art.

Of course, even though jujitsu could neutralize opponents without hurting them, that was on top of gymnastic mats. If someone inexperienced received a hip or shoulder throw on concrete, his back and spine would undoubtedly break along with the rest of his life. Thankfully, I didn't need to worry about that now.

“Hap!”

“Hmph, what are you trying to do by grabbing me? Don't tell me, you're trying to throw me...!?”

You thought I couldn't? If you thought I couldn't pick you up with 9 levels of mid-rank martial arts, you're mistaken! I grabbed the arm he tried to strike out with and proceeded to do a hip throw. With his awful stance, I did not need to work hard to ruin his balance. The only slightly hard part came from the fact that he

was much taller than me.

When his heavy body hit the ground, it was as if a meteorite had struck and a thundering roar boomed out. Seeing the ground crack, I realized this guy had potential as a weapon. Maybe I should carry him around instead of my spear!

“Kuk!”

“Your head’s going to ring! Especially with that hard head of yours!”

Dragon Skin was most likely a skill that maximized the outer skin’s defense. However, that did not mean it protected the internal organs. Rather, if enough force struck the hard outer layer, the impact would travel inside and hurt the internal system. It was the same concept as when one got hit by a bullet while wearing a bulletproof vest. The bullet wouldn’t penetrate the skin, but the force from it would break one’s ribs.

By picking him up and throwing him down on the ground, I essentially pitted the Lizard Knight and the hard ground against each other. Although I would have preferred to continue with a joint lock, I knew it wouldn’t work on the Lizard Knight whose entirely body has been hardened by Dragon Skin. If he wanted to continue lying on ground, I could only leave him be.

Of course, being the idiot that he was, the Lizard Knight got up and sent a kick toward me. Unwavering courage, undying vigor! I didn’t hate him for that. In fact, I liked it.

“Hook kick!”

“Kuhuk!”

“Shoulder throw!”

“Kuaaak!”

For the entire 5 minutes when his body was hardened, the Lizard Knight became a testing object for my jujitsu techniques. Every time he fell, he got up, without knowing to stop. Eventually, after taking a two-handed grip shoulder throw, he coughed out black blood and collapsed.

“Kaaaaaak!”

At the same time, his reddened skin turned back to its normal color. It seemed that Dragon Skin had run out. I once again picked up my spear. His once fierce gaze was now blankly chasing the tip of my spear. It seemed the effect of Dragon Skin ending overlapped with the effect of the intense date he had with the ground.

“I’ll show you what real spearmanship looks like.”

I was truly too kind. The skill Heroic Strike was so fast that no enemy could see through how it worked. As such, I did not use the skill, but manually concentrated my body’s energy and mana on

the tip of my spear. With this, I was positive that even this idiot could see ‘real spearmanship.’ Real spearmanship wasn’t some cheat like hitting the ground with large amount of mana and strength.

“T-That’s...!”

“Well, you’re going to die soon anyways!”

With glaring eyes, I shot my spear toward his face. With a rather unpleasant sound, the light in his eyes dimmed. Like Loretta said, the Lizard Knight really was easier than the Dark Ratman. Though, my Dark Thunder Explosion did play a big part.

Immediately afterwards.

[Amazing! You are the first in First Dungeon’s history to succeed in soloing the Lizard Knight on the first try! The dungeon will remember you as a Great Explorer. You obtained 2 skill points as a reward. You obtained a Special Mansion Free Purchase Ticket. Remaining skill points: 6]

[You obtained the title, ‘Lizard Knight Master.’ All stats increase by 2. This effect will apply even if the title is not equipped.]

[You defeated the Lizard Knight alone. You obtained the special reward, ‘Lizard Knight’s Scale Armor.]

[You obtained 10,000 gold.]

[You received the only reward left hidden for the First Explorer. Congratulations! Your luck stat increases by 1.]

[Secret. Divine Speed Magic Book]

Looking over the reward from defeating the Lizard Knight, I found it hard to calm myself.

First. So this was the ‘first’ that Loretta was referring to. 2 skill points. It was the amount equivalent to creating two skills or completing two quests. There was also the Special Mansion Free Purchase Ticket, not that I knew what it was.

The title was also different. Lizard Knight Master. It gave 2 points to all stats instead of 1. If I had defeated the Orc Lord, Wraith Queen, and Dark Ratman in the same way, then... No, let’s not think about meaningless things. I needed to focus on now and the future.

I would have received the gold and the scale armor regardless, so what interested me next was what came after. The only reward left hidden, Divine Speed Magic Book. Just the word ‘secret’ made it seem extraordinary. Just when I was about to learn it, a fanfare rang out.

[You became level 21. You obtained the qualification to climb to the 21st floor.]

[You became Silver Rank 9. You are no longer an apprentice explorer, but an official explorer.]

[You can appoint one person as a First Dungeon Explorer. This is a right given only to Bronze Rank explorers who explored the dungeon for 20 years, or to explorers who have been promoted to the Silver Rank. When you become a Gold Rank explorer, you can appoint an additional person as a dungeon explorer.]

[As a Silver Rank explorer, you obtained the right to enter Event Dungeons. You can enter Event Dungeons by hunting monsters or finding hidden areas while exploring.]

[You obtained the right to participate in Event Raids! Event Raids are created when specific Event Dungeons are cleared, or when the necessary conditions are met. The Event Raid's creator becomes the host and can invite others to participate. One can join a raid by accepting the host's invite. One's levels or qualifications may prevent him or her from participating, and the host maintains the right to enter and exit raids.]

[You can buy a residence in the dungeon by going to the dungeon's residential area. The residences of explorers from various worlds are located here, and support and recreational facilities exist to ensure explorer's can make the best use of their time of leisure. Explorers can privately meet with other



explorers, and a market exists where various foods are sold. However, to enter the residential area, one must use a Residential Area Entrance Ticket, dropped by monsters above the 21st floor. Other dungeons' explorers cannot enter the First Dungeon Residential Area.]

... Eh? I was an apprentice until now? I suddenly felt irritated. So all this time when I was gloating in self-satisfaction, it was like a baby being proud after learning how to walk! The pride I felt from being the First to defeat the Lizard Knight suddenly shrunk.

“No, this is where it begins!”

Let's not be so hard on myself. I've only been a dungeon explorer for 5 years. Not to mention, I spent 3 years of that period stuck on the 5th floor unwillingly. I was doing well! I can continue to do well! It's not like I didn't know how much I had left to travel. There was no need to be down. I just had to keep running and keep getting stronger. More so than the superheroes I dreamed of being when I was young!

Perhaps because I was now an official explorer, I found out many things about the dungeon that I did not know before. The first was the Event Dungeon. I already knew about it since I had heard from Ellos. I could explore a unique dungeon using an Event Dungeon Entrance Ticket that monsters dropped with an extremely low chance. And of course, I could expect a hefty reward when it was cleared.

There was also the Event Raid, which happened at a fixed rate

when an Event Dungeon was cleared. A minimum of 50 explorers could gather to fight a boss monster incomparable to the Floor Masters. Just thinking about it made my heart beat. I wanted to quickly participate in an Event Raid. Of course, not that anyone would include me with my low level.

This was the first time I had heard about the residential area. I never expected something like that to exist in the dungeon either. It seemed I could just stay there without ever going back to my own world. Although, I would never do so as a college student and Yua's older brother. The residential area also seemed like the place where I could use the Special Mansion Free Purchase Ticket. Special Mansion... I was curious, but I had no way of going there as of yet.

In summary, there were four benefits I gained from becoming an official explorer.

1. Authority to appoint one person to be a First Dungeon Explorer.
2. Ability to find and join Event Dungeons.
3. Ability to participate in Event Raids.
4. Right to enter the residential area.

After I organized the info, it did not seem so complicated anymore. With that, I finally checked the Divine Speed skill I received.

[You learned the active skill, 'Divine Speed.' By using 20 percent of your mana, you can quintuple your speed for 0.5 seconds. The skill duration and speed increase goes up with increased skill levels, and the required mana decreases with increased skill levels.]

“Huu.”

I let out a deep breathe. I focused on the fact that this skill was a growth type skill. Although it only increased my speed for 0.5 seconds for using 20 percent of my mana, 400 percent speed increase was amazing. Since every aspect of the skill increased with increased skill level, I eagerly anticipated its growth.

[Master?]

“No, Peika. It was thanks to you that I could beat the Floor Master. Thanks.”

[Hu, Huhu! Now you realize my true worth!]

Busy looking over all the information, I randomly replied to Peika's murmur. Thankfully, she seemed extremely satisfied with whatever I said as she crossed her arms and puffed out her chest. Seeing her cute reaction, I couldn't help but pat her on the head, and ended up being scolded again.

## Chapter 34. From Today, I'm An Official Explorer (4)

---

College was boring. It wasn't that different from high school. I had no expectations in the first place. I was a dungeon explorer. My stage was the dungeon, not the school.

However, as member of society and citizen of Korea, I had to be in a social position appropriate for my age. Even with my above 20 intelligence, I couldn't quite understand these things.

Mother knew that I was a dungeon explorer just like father, and thus could make just as much money as him. Even so, she insisted on me attending college because 'I was at that age.'

This way of thinking seemed... fake. It was doing something for appearances' sake. Perhaps, this was what was keeping society afloat, especially now when the world flipped upside down with the appearance of monsters and the Awakened.

As I was having a rare moment of serious contemplation, Su Ye-Eun gobbled down fries.

"I can really eat it all? Really?"

"Yeah, you can."

"A-Angel... I love you!"

“Yeah, I don’t.”

Her large-size love was only worth 6,500 won. I rejected her hot and cheap love and blankly stared at her eating fries. Today was Thursday. Classes ended at 5:30. It was also the day when my class overlapped with Su Ye-Eun’s.

Midterms were coming up, but Su Ye-Eun persuaded me to go out for fries and beer. Her aim was clearly fries rather than beer, but I didn’t particularly reject her offer.

“What are you thinking about, Shin?”

“Nothing.”

Su Ye-Eun had a monsterphobia. It was why she shook so uncontrollably and froze when we met that pigeon.

Monsters. Surprisingly, people living in the 21st century found it hard to understand these strange creatures who possessed unusual sizes, appearances, and abilities. Not only did people feel natural aversion towards them, but they also froze in front of these creatures who possessed incomprehensible strength. Monsterphobia emerged as a new word to describe people like them. In truth, most people who did not awaken to an ability possessed some degree of monsterphobia.

However, Su Ye-Eun was an ability user. Although she was found

out by me immediately, her stealth ability was one of the best abilities to survive a monster encounter. I suspected that there was a good reason why she was so afraid of monsters.

Although I was curious, I didn't really try to find out. I didn't want to be involved, though if she asked for help, I would oblige to a certain degree.

... I wondered if the fact that I was thinking all this meant I considered her to be a good friend, but I soon threw that thought in the trashcan. Damn, I really should have found someone else to be friends with. All those times I spent in the dungeon and not attending to my social life was coming back to bite me.

As I was thinking these rather useless things, it happened completely out of the blue.

[A dungeon explorer from Earth conquered the 50th floor and became a Gold rank dungeon explorer! A dungeon explorer communication channel will now open on Earth! Those who wish to talk may do so by putting their left hand on their mouth. When you don't want to hear from the communication channel, you can just say 'channel off.']

[Earth's dungeon explorers, you heard that right? I cleared the dungeon's 50th floor. Can you all hear me?]

I shot up from my seat. Although Su Ye-Eun stared at me with strange eyes, I wasn't in a state of mind to pay attention to her. I first took out my cellphone and texted my father, 'don't say

anything.' I then sat back down, trying to act calm. Meanwhile, I could hear voices whispering in my ear.

[My name is Hwaya Eleni Mastiford, an SS-rank ability user and a dungeon explorer of the Second Dungeon. My Korean name is Ye Hwaya. I have British citizenship so keep that in mind.]

I clicked my tongue. An SS-rank ability user was a dungeon explorer! Both father and I knew other dungeon explorers could have awakened too, but we didn't expect the ability to be an SS-rank ability! She said her name was Ye Hwaya. She was that fire girl from TV.

A wall I felt I could jump over someday suddenly felt a few hundred times, a few thousand kilometers higher. Biting down on my lips, I paid attention to her words.

[You all should know that there are only five dungeon explorers on Earth. I want to keep it like that for a while. That is, I don't want any new dungeon explorers to emerge. After all, we can't just let anyone become a dungeon explorer.]

Her silvery voice continued to ring out like a bell.

[We have to come together. Aren't we a bit special to be considered the same as other ability users? When we gather, we'll have synergistic effects. Of course, since I have an SS-rank ability and became the first on Earth to conquer the 50th floor, I would be the leader. I want to create an organization of dungeon explorers, and I want you all to be in it.]

[... Interesting plan, Mastiford.]

It was the deep voice of a man. It was not father's voice, so it had to be a dungeon explorer I didn't know. I closely listened to his voice.

[I admit you're the strongest among us. But that doesn't mean we should be under your command.]

[I'm not saying I'll command you however I wish. It's just that if we come together, the leader position should belong to the strongest one.]

[Ha. Your offer isn't very tempting nor convincing. Even without coming together, dungeon explorers have the potential to command over other ability users.]

[We can be stronger if we're together! We'll have a stronger voice as well! Plus, I'm not saying we should come together for a monetary reason. What about the others? You should know about it, right? What happened to other worlds with access to the dungeon.]

I did. A demon lord was rampaging in the Luka continent, and invaders appeared on the Edias continent. The residents of their continents were truly fighting to determine their fates. Our world too... monsters began to appear.



“Shin?”

“Shh.”

Su Ye-Eun who was worrying about me blanking out completely. I waved my hand to shush her, and focused on the communication channel. This time, I heard another voice chime in. It sounded like a young girl's.

[I-I'm Su... Sumire Violet Minami. So is Mastiford-ssi saying... that if we gather, we can defeat all the monsters in the world?]

[Oh, you're a half too? But yes. We can grow until we reach the end. When we come together, no country or institution can ignore or take advantage of us. Plus, as long as we have the power to appoint dungeon explorers, we can use that power to expand our organization.]

[A-Appoint? We can appoint other dungeon explorers?]

[... It seems little miss here is still an apprentice.]

The man spoke with a disappointed voice. Tsk, that girl. I knew it from when she revealed her name, but she wasn't so bright. She should have pretended to know.

[You'll become Silver rank when you break through floor 20, Sumire. Then you're given the right to appoint one dungeon explorer. When you become Gold rank, you can appoint another.]

[Ah, I see. I'm still on the 18th floor. It's only been 2 years since I came to the dungeon.]

18 floors in 2 years!? Well, I didn't know which dungeon she was in. If I had mana, I could have done it too... No, don't mind it. Calm down, calm down.

[Huhu, Sumire. You shouldn't give out your information so freely. Unni's worried.]

It seems Mastiford favored how pure and innocent the girl was. But hey, you revealed that you were from the Second Dungeon too! Why don't you worry about yourself?

Minami laughed at her and answered.

[Aren't we all comrades? I don't think we need to hide ourselves.]

This girl. She's telling me and father to come out, right? You level 18! Father's weak to these things!

[You're right, young lady. Sorry for staying silent. I just wanted to listen in on the beautiful voices for a bit.]

As expected, father appeared with some nonsense drivel. Beautiful voice my ass. Classic music makes you fall asleep in less than 5 seconds!

[Then there's only one left. Don't tell me you're going to stay silent?]

It was the deep voiced man. I thought for a while, then came to a decision. Putting my left hand on my mouth, I talked.

[I didn't really want to cut in on your conversation. An organization of dungeon explorers. It sounds interesting and will probably be effective. I just don't see how it would be different from Guardian or Freedom Wing.]

[It will be different! Dungeon explorers will have their say. The organization's goal will be to find the underlying reason why the monsters appeared and solve it.]

[Mastiford-ssi, all organizations start out with righteous causes. Guardian is an example, and the result is as you see.]

[How cheeky.]

It seemed Mastiford wasn't happy with being told off by me, as a hint of anger flashed in her voice. I could almost feel the heat in my ears.

[To be honest, I'm quite interested in the organization you're planning to make and its goal. I agree that if we don't take care of this monster crisis, our world might be in danger like the other worlds.]

[Then why did you say what you just said?]

[I'll be honest. I'm weaker than you, but I'm not the type of person to crawl between someone's legs. So we can talk again when I become stronger than you. I'll happily join your organization, though I'll be the boss then. I won't need to worry about the organization losing its focus either.]

[Pft.]

[Now that's a man! But I'll be the one to be the boss, so... kuum, boy!]

The deep voiced man snorted while father made a childish comment. Not to mention, he almost revealed that we were father and son. Mastiford replied.

[Pft, you? You want to surpass me? A Second Dungeon's Gold rank explorer? An SS-rank ability user?]

[Mm, so that's the first thing you say. If you were really worried about the world, that wouldn't be the first thing on your mind. It wouldn't matter who the boss is, right?]

Of course, I knew I was just picking apart her words. I was digging into her hubris and making her lose her train of thought. Mastiford was baited in perfectly.

[But it's obvious that I would become the leader as the strongest! Aren't you the one overestimating yourself? How are you going to surpass me!? Plus, I'm really thinking about the future of us dungeon explorers!]

[No, I agree with the boy, Mastiford. I can see clearly just how this organization of yours is going to run. Good luck, but I'm out.]

[Mm, I'm still weaker than the young lady too. I also don't want to work under someone. Best of luck!]

Did my words lead to this result? No, father probably wouldn't have joined anyways, but him leaving with the deep voiced man leaving made Mastiford look like a fool. Nice assist, father!

[W-What's with everyone!? I think unni has a point. She's the strongest one right now, and she's also the one who brought up the idea of making an organization!]

[It's not about that, little miss. It's just that Mastiford isn't trustworthy.]

[N-Not trustworthy? You haven't even met me...]

The young girl was just as innocent as her name suggested<sup>2</sup>. She didn't know how to doubt someone. Of course, I wasn't so innocent to trust someone asking me to join her organization.

[I don't know about Miss Minami, but I have a strong pride, so I

can't work under someone like her.]

In truth, I didn't think Mastiford had any ill intentions. She was quick to show that she favored Minami and revealed information about her that she did not need to. She was probably as hot-blooded and honest as her ability, flames.

However, she had strong self-esteem and wanted to be above others. I had no plans to work under someone like that. Even if I had something to gain, it would only bring more pain than comfort.

I was no pushover. Until I at least held the same position as her, I had no intention to talk to her.

[Are you saying you'll ignore a global crisis just because of your pride!?!]

[Global crisis, you say. Then I'll ask you a question, Miss Minami. What can we do together? Can we not do anything when we're apart?]

[T-That's... But being together will be more...!]

[I think I'm done here. Mastiford-ssi, I assume you're done as well?]

[Hmph! I wouldn't accept a narrow-minded person like you anyways! Sumire, let's just talk between the two of us.]

[Y-Yes, unni...]

Girls were truly mysterious. They could talk so friendly within minutes of meeting each other. As I was about to shout 'channel off' with such prejudiced thoughts, the deep voiced man cut in.

[I'm Edward Walker, also British and 26 years old. Boy, may I know your name?]

[British!? You said you're British! Then how can you say that to me?]

Two of the five explorers were British. Of the 7 known SS-rank ability users, there was another British ability user besides Mastiford.

It wasn't like Britain had a huge population, so how did this happen? Well, it was most likely just a coincidence. That said, it seemed Britain would have stronger authority than other countries. It was mildly infuriating. Although I wasn't exactly a patriotic person, I knew it wasn't a good thing for one country to possess so many powerful ability users.

No, with me and father around, Korea was the strongest country in the world!

After hearing Edward Walker introduce himself, I contemplated whether to reveal my name or not. Then, I came to a decision.

[I'm Yeon Hwawoo. I'm Korean and 23 years old.]

I lied.

[Y-You! You're Korean!? I should've known from the irritating way you talked! You do something about your government and media! They keep insisting that I'm a Korean ability user! I'm British! A proud British noble!]

[Ehh, a noble in this day and age... Sorry Mastiford-ssi, but I didn't even know you were a half until today. Plus, I couldn't give a crap whether you're from Korea, Britain, or Atlantis.]

[Atlantis is fictional!]

[Good bye, fictional lady. I won't remember you.]

[Ugaaaah!]

[Mm, Yeon Hwawoo. I'll remember that name. It seems you're worth watching over.]

[Feel free.]

With that, I turned off the communication channel. I received a text from father immediately afterwards.



[When did you plaster your tongue with oil, son?]

It's none of your business! Well, maybe it was.

“You must be stressed from all those tests coming up. Want me to take you to a doctor?”

“You mind your business, you potato demon!”

Why was no one around me normal!?

# Chapter 35. From Today, I'm An Official Explorer (5)

---

I always wondered why so many people knew my Crown Prince nickname. When Mastiford broke through the 50th floor and the communication channel among dungeon explorers was created on Earth, I finally understood why.

It all began on the 5th floor. In the 3 years that I stayed hunting the Orc Lord, word quickly spread that there was someone helping others pass through the 5th floor easily. That was when I got the nickname, Crown Prince.

The people that passed the 5th floor with my help must have talked about me on their continent's dungeon explorer communication channels. And just like that, people were able to recognize me on the 10th floor.

“Really, that’s a violation of my privacy.”

Confirming that my party had been filled up to the max the moment I created it, I murmured in a tired voice. Soon, nine explorers began to appear in front of me. Three women and six men. Two of the women were priestesses and one was an archer.

Two of the men held shields and swords, one wore a magician's robe, then there was an archer, a priest, and a young man with a claymore on his back who looked to be my age.

“It really is Crown Prince-nim!”

“Kyaa, it’s Crown prince-nim!”

“He’s just as handsome as the rumors say.”

“He looks soft, I don’t see how he’s so strong.”

‘I can hear you guys, you know?’ As I looked at them with a dumbfounded expression, the magician came up and talked to me.

“I haven’t heard that Crown Prince-nim advanced to the 20th floor. Are we your first party?”

“Yes.”

“It’s an honor!”

I didn’t refuse his hand shake. He was wearing a smile that made people feel good. It might just be my subjective judgement, but dungeon explorers were generally good people. There were some like Palludia or that party leader from the Dark Ratman raid who were narrow-minded, but even they weren’t evil or heinous.

I thought about why and soon came to an answer. The first generation of the First Dungeon’s dungeon explorers were specifically chosen, and those that followed were chosen by these Pioneers. As such, they had upright personalities.

Of course, I did not mean that evil people could not be talented enough to be chosen as a Pioneer, nor would all Followers chosen by the Pioneers be kind.

But I remembered Loretta saying that dungeon explorers did not come to the dungeon just because they were talented or strong. In other words, there were other reasons they were chosen. I suspected that one's character was one of them.

As I said before, I was not certain that there were no heinous explorers. However, I had yet to meet one. I was certain that if they existed, they were few in number.

“Are you that Crown Prince?”

As I was greeting the other party members, the man with the claymore approached me and asked. He had a lion-like hair style and a scraggly beard. He had a sense of wildness that drew people in.

I answered.

“Yes, I am. People have been calling me that for some time. Although I don't really like it, I can't do much about it.”

“Hm. To be honest, I don't understand why your name is so popular among other explorers, but I know it's foolish to judge a book by its cover, so I'll make my judgement after the raid.”

His way of talking was strange, but since I didn't feel any malicious intent, I decided not to care too much about it. Then, as the party leader, I began to tell them my strategy, though I was ashamed to even call it that.

“Alright, here's the plan. First, we'll separate our attack team into two.”

“Two?”

“Yep. One will be me, and the other will be all the other damage dealers with the claymore warrior-nim as the center.”

“... Aren't you a being a bit too self-confident?”

The claymore warrior looked at me with worrying eyes. Mm, it was a reasonable response. However, the magician stepped in to answer him.

“You may not know it warrior-nim, but Crown Prince-nim is extremely famous among lower level explorers. He overwhelmingly crushed the 5th, 10th, and 15th Floor Masters and allowed countless number of explorers to advance.”

“But there's no guarantee that the same will happen on the 20th floor.”

It was yet another reasonable response. I began to like the claymore warrior. However, the magician seemed to be at a loss for words, so I stepped in and talked to the claymore warrior.

“You’re right... Your name?”

“... Ren, you can call me Ren.”

“Ren. At the very least, my method will work on the 20th floor. I’ve already confirmed it.”

“But didn’t you say this was your first time fighting the 20th Floor Master?”

“I said it was my first party for the 20th Floor Master.”

“Hm? Isn’t that the same thing? I’m not quite understanding what you...!?”

Ren suddenly seemed thunderstruck as he opened his eyes widely. It was the same for others around me. With a teasing smile, I asked.

“Are you good now?”

“Y-You... Is that true!? You fought against the Floor Master alone and won!?”

“Yes.”

“Impossible! Didn’t Crown Prince-nim always fight against Floor Masters in parties?”

“Naturally, when I fight the Floor Masters alone, no one would be around to see it.”

“ ... ”

“C-Crown Prince...”

“Crazy. Could he be telling the truth?”

“What would Crown Prince gain from lying? He’s already famous through all the worlds.”

“We can just confirm it. Regardless, it’s true that Crown Prince-nim is strong.”

“I heard rumors that Crown Prince was collecting Floor Masters’ equipment sets. So it was true...”

“C-Could that be the full Dark Ratman Set? No way, I didn’t think it was possible.”

As the party members murmured among themselves, Ren looked

at me with sparkling eyes and asked.

“Can you spar with me once?”

“If you can wait until the raid ends, then sure.”

“Alright, it’s a promise! Let’s hurry up and finish this then!”

When I gladly nodded my head, Ren suddenly became upbeat and urged the other party members on, and I had to stop him with a bitter smile.

“We only decided on the attack teams. The next is the support team. We have two archers, right? You guys make sure that the Lizard Knight doesn’t attack the priest and priestesses. When I give the signal, focus on attacking the Lizard Knight, especially in places like his eyes.”

“Got it, Crown Prince-nim.”

“Understood.”

The two archers seemed to have accepted my orders without any objection. What I said was just an embellished version of ‘stand around and attack when we’re pummeling him.’ It seemed saying it like this made them think they were playing important roles.

“Magician-nim, can you use debuff type magic?”



“I’m Enun. Unfortunately, I can’t. I’ve only learned amplification magic and ice element magic.”

“Amplification?”

“I can amplify someone’s ability by about 50 percent for 3 seconds. It’s a pretty rare skill. If the timing is right, it can show great results.”

“That’s great!”

It wasn’t just flattery. Amplification truly did sound like a good skill. Although it had a short time period of 3 seconds, that was something I could overcome with my ability. I requested that he use it on me or other damage dealers when I gave the signal, and he easily accepted it.

“I trust that the healers know what to do.”

“I can use buffs.”

“I can cast shields and recovery spells.”

“Same.”

“Perfect. I’ll leave it to you then. Let’s go.”

Confirming that all party members were ready, I opened the door boldly. The Lizard Knight was in the same position as he was yesterday, waiting for us to come in. It was slightly irritating.

“Challengers? So many of them, too.”

“I’ll be the first to go. The second team can go behind him and just deal as much damage as possible. I’ll block all his attacks. Just be careful of his tail.”

When I fought the Lizard Knight last time, he did not use his tail attack. I didn’t know why. Did he think he didn’t need to against one man? Or was it his pride as a spearman?

My Dark Thunder Explosion could have also forced him to skip the tail attack phase and go straight to the earthquake attack phase. No matter what the answer was, it did not matter. The only disappointing part was that I could have killed him quicker if he used his tail since he would have been more open to my attacks.

“Good luck, Crown Prince-nim!”

“May the blessing of the Goddess be with you. Bless!”

[You received a blessing. Your resistance to physical attack increases. Your physical and magical attack power increases.]

“Peika, I’ll leave it to you.”

[Got it.]

Following Bless, Peika silently went into my weapon. There were ways to use Peika other than Spirit Aura, but Spirit Aura was the most efficient when fighting in close range. The party members, who didn’t know about Peika, were startled, but I ignored them and charged toward the Lizard Knight.

“Kuwaaaaaa!”

“Your breath stinks!”

The moment Lizard Knight’s long spear shot toward me, I slid on the ground and shot my spear up from underneath. Although he was wearing a full body armor, it was not attached to his body. From underneath, I could easily see the gap between his armor and skin. It was one of the pieces of information I picked up from my last fight with him.

“Uwaaak!”

“It’s going to tingle. Tempest!”

“Kuaaak!”

Oh, interesting. The Lizard Knight floated in air for a second. While I stopped my sliding and got up, the Lizard Knight screamed out in pain without being able to hold himself steady. Meanwhile, the second attack team safely got behind him.

“... What did we just see?”

“Crown Prince-nim charged in, and it seemed like he was about to get hit by the Lizard Knight’s spear...”

“Before we noticed it, the Lizard Knight was screaming in pain mid flight.”

Ignoring the useless people wearing their spectator goggles, I continued to attack the Lizard Knight.

“You really are weak to pain. How did you manage to become a Floor Master?”

[You used Provoke! The enemy’s focus falls on you!]

“Kuaaaak! I’ll kill you, Human!”

“I’ve heard that line over a thousand times, and here I am!”

I did die a few times, but they didn’t count since I only got kicked

out of the dungeon!

## Chapter 36. From Today, I'm An Official Explorer (6)

---

The Lizard Knight roared and thrust his spear toward me. Before his spear could touch my body, I parried it with my glaive. His spear shot up into the air, and as he was unable to withstand my strength, it separated from his grip. I used my glaive and quickly pushed it away.

All of this takes some time to describe, but actually happened in the space of a second. Although I wasn't weak, I was no match for the Lizard Knight in a direct exchange of strength. I had to rely on my techniques.

“No way, the Floor Master let go of his weapon!”

“I saw it too, so stop shaking me by my neck!”

I took my stance and pulled my spear back. The Lizard Knight let out a rage filled roar and swung his tail. It was exactly at the same time when the second attack team made their move.

“Whoa, dodge his tail first!”

“Hmph, Lion Strike!”

While the other damage dealers were running back, Ren shouted out and swung his claymore down at the Lizard Knight's tail. Since

he said Lion Strike, it was likely a skill.

His claymore, dyed gold, collided with the tail with a boom. Along with the explosive sound, I heard the Lizard Knight's scream. I did not wait to find out what happened. I was certain Ren had crushed him.

“Enun, amplify me!”

“Got it! Amplification!”

The moment Enun used Amplification, I felt an instant surge of strength. I could certainly feel the amplification. It felt like the mana around me was flooding toward me. At the same time, I instinctively felt that this state would not last long.

“Everyone get back! Heroic Strike, Divine Speed!”

This was my first time using the Divine Speed skill, which quintupled my speed for 0.5 seconds. With faster speed, it was obvious that the attack power would increase. Although I could also use it to dodge attacks, the Lizard Knight's attacks weren't so fast that I needed to use Divine Speed to dodge them.

Divine Speed was truly powerful. When I thrust out with my spear as I normally did, I heard the sound of my spear cutting wind as it entered the Lizard Knight's stomach. White light enveloped my glaive as it flickered with lightning from Spirit Aura. With the incredible boost from Divine Speed on top of everything else, my

spear was no different from Zeus' lightning.

“Kuak!”

The Lizard Knight's armor, as well as the scales protecting him, broke in an instant. With a shrill cry, the Lizard Knight coughed out a mouthful of blood. It seemed the amplification did its job.

Of course, I wasn't doing so well either. Heroic Strike normally had a strong recoil. With the momentum from Divine Speed added, my arm throbbed like it was going to be ripped off.

“Is Ren okay!?”

“He's alive! I'm healing him at the moment!”

“Kuk... I'm... fine!”

It seemed he received a huge recoil from his attack. As I was worrying about Ren, the Lizard Knight threw away his broken armor and became bare-skinned. It seemed that's when he realized he did not have his spear as he rushed to where the spear went flying. Even I had no plans to block his charge head on. As such, I stepped back and shouted to the archers.

“Archers, attack!”

“Yes!”



To stop the Lizard Knight's movements, the two archers endlessly shot out their arrows. Meanwhile, the priest and priestesses managed to restore Ren to fighting condition. Spitting out some blood, Ren held up his claymore and asked, "What happened to his tail?"

"Ah, it's dangling, half-severed."

"Ah, I see..."

I answered Ren as I watched the Lizard Knight happily picking up his spear. Although Ren seemed depressed that he was unable to completely sever the Lizard Knight's tail, I was surprised on the inside.

It was extremely difficult to cut the limbs or tail of a Floor Master. Their bodies were built completely different from normal monsters. Rather than cutting their limbs, it was much more efficient to continuously attack their pressure points.

However, Ren managed to crush a Floor Master's tail with a single use of a skill. It was a questionable attack from a warrior's point of view since he destroyed his body in the process, but that was why healers existed.

In truth, although the way he used his strength seemed foolish, I had to at least acknowledge the force it carried. Frankly, he was stronger than the current me. As his claymore suggested, his class likely put great emphasis on his strength.

As I was thinking about Ren, the Lizard Knight, who managed to retrieve his spear, raised it up high. I, of course, would not miss this opening. Just as I pulled my spear back slightly to use Tempest...

“Haaap!”

Ren cut in with his stupidly large claymore.

“Lion Upper!”

Unlike his large body suggested, he moved rather nimbly. Having approached the Lizard Knight, Ren swung his claymore from the bottom to the top toward the Lizard Knight’s spear. It wasn’t a bad approach. However, unless he had a technique to make use of the enemy’s strength to maximize the counteractive force, it was better to just strike from top to bottom to mess up the enemy’s breathing!

“Kyaha! Human!”

“Die! Ugh, uwoaah!”

It was just as I expected. Ren was unable to win against the downward force of the Lizard Knight’s spear. His claymore was sent flying and the Lizard Knight’s spear ended up hitting the ground like he wanted.

Me? Because Ren made me miss my timing to use Tempest, I used Divine Speed to approach the Lizard Knight the moment his spear struck the ground.

“Cough!”

“Uwaaak!”

“Kuk, damn it!”

[Party member Sherbitz died.]

[Party member Enun Von Karbia died.]

[Party member Rodlin Von Ionard died.]

[Party member Deruin died.]

Damn, just a single earthquake attack had killed four party members. They were the three healers and the magician, Enun. It seemed all he did was use Amplification once. At least the priest and priestesses healed Ren...

Me? I had leapt forward with Divine Speed's 0.5 second boost and was flying toward the Lizard Knight.

“Kuaaak!”

“Kuk, hang on! Use your potions!”

“Crown Prince-nim!”

I was going to take care of it even if you didn’t call me!

I was near the Lizard Knight before I knew it. At a spear’s thrust distance away, I first attacked the Lizard Knight’s eye. Although he tried to intercept me, I was faster. My spear hit its eye perfectly, causing blood to explode out.

[Critical Hit!]

“Kuak!”

“Tempest!”

I first stunned the Lizard Knight from holding his spear up. In the instant when his body lost its tension, I once again made him lose his spear. After the earthquake ended, the Lizard Knight swung his half-severed tail at me with fury.

I was waiting for this moment.

“Elemental Tempest!”

[Whoooo!]

[Everyone gather up! Prince-nim is going to scold us otherwise!]

[Hurry, hurry! We're going to be late!]

[That looks delicious! Someone fry it up!]

[There are no fire elementals here!]

I couldn't believe it. Even the process in which the elementals gathered was shortening. Seeing the usually lax elementals rush to my spear, I shot my spear directly at the cut on the Lizard Knight's tail.

With the swooshing sound of air being cut, a storm ripped the Lizard Knight's tail apart.

“Kuaaak!”

“The tail got cut!”

“Please, does that look like it got cut? It got shredded!”

As expected, a skill that used half of my MP was indescribably strong. Heroic Strike, Divine Speed, and Elemental Tempest. Thanks to these skills, my MP was completely drained. As a result, I felt nauseous and my head throbbed.

Gulping down a lowest-grade Mana Potion, I landed. As it only restored 100 mana, it only helped to slightly alleviate the symptoms.

Lizard Knight was now using Dragon Skin.

“Kukuku, humans, you are strong, I admit! But that won’t matter now!”

“Yeah, the one I met yesterday said something similar.”

“Kuk, I’ll finish him off!”

Ren the eager warrior said as he got up with his claymore. He was exactly the type of person who kept getting up after he was knocked down. However, if things were left to Ren, he would undoubtedly mess up like before. As such, I silently waved my hand at Ren.

“Just stand there and watch.”

“But!”

“Because you couldn’t block his attack, four people lost a week of their time.”

“Kuk!”

I deactivated Spirit Aura. I put my glaive aside and charged toward the Lizard Knight bare handed. He had to be severely damaged from Heroic Strike, Lion Strike, Elemental Tempest, and the archer's focused attack... well maybe not that. In any case, his condition was obvious from his shaking legs. It was almost like he was begging for me to use my techniques!

"Here's a two handed grip shoulder throw!"

"Uwuuk!"

"N-No way!"

"C-Crown Prince picked up and threw the Lizard Knight!"

"I can't stop myself. I'm falling in love with him. I must marry him now!"

"But you're a guy!"

Before I noticed it, the damage dealers from the second attack team had gotten up and were now spectating with popcorn in hand. However, as I was focused on the fight, I could not hear what they were murmuring about. I did not want to either!

I threw the Lizard Knight over and over again without stop. Because I had no mana left, I knew my body wouldn't last the

moment I missed a technique. I was in a more dangerous situation than yesterday. This was all Ren's fault.

“Human! A mere human!”

“It happens, and sometimes you die before you know it!”

“Humaaaaaan!”

“What, Lizard Kniiiight! This is the end! Floating drop!”

This was the power of level 9 mid-rank martial arts technique and body strengthened with mana! As I threw the 2.3m giant down on the ground, the Lizard Knight coughed out blood.

“Kuk, human... Hero...!”

“That wasn't even Heroic Strike, you fool!”

In case it was still alive after spitting out a mouthful of blood, I made sure it was dead with my spear. He soon disappeared and we finally heard the system message we were all used to hearing.

[You defeated the Floor Master!]



# Chapter 37. From Today, I'm An Official Explorer (7)

---

[10,000 gold is distributed evenly among party members. You received 1667 gold.]

[Rewards will be distributed in order of contribution.]

[Kang Shin-nim's contribution is the highest. Choose your reward.]

1. Lizard Knight's Silver Spear
2. Middle Potion
3. 1,000 Gold
4. Mid-rank Mana Potion
5. Scale Knife
6. 1,500 Gold]

Looking at the list of rewards, I became speechless. Could it get any worse!?

Although I got unlucky from time to time, today was too much. Was it because of Ren's stupid move in the middle? Because I was interested in what 'medicine' the Lizard Knight would drop, I couldn't help but be disappointed. In the end, I grabbed the Lizard Knight's Silver Spear.

I'd been meaning to replace my Orc Lord's Glaive. I couldn't keep tormenting it. It was time to use a spear that matched my level.

Silver Spear was certainly a good spear. It was made out of some silver-colored metal and was very hard. Although it wasn't as long as the one Lizard Knight used, it was still about 3 meters long and had a very good thickness to it.

The blade on the spearhead seemed long enough to be used for slashing, and the tip of especially sharp. I loved it. Whether in function or look, it satisfied me completely.

Unlike with the Orc Lord's Glaive, the moment I held the Silver Spear, a message popped up.

[By equipping the Lizard Knight's Silver Spear, your strength and dexterity increase by 2. The Lizard Knight Master title grants another 3 strength and dexterity.]

That's right. It was about time that weapons had effects like this! With a satisfied smile, I looked around at my party members.

There wasn't a happy atmosphere like I expected. Usually, when I defeated the Floor Master, everyone was happy no matter how big of a loss we suffered. However, the party members seemed to be angry. They were also all glaring at Ren.

“People died because Ren-nim did unnecessary things!”

“Your contribution points must have been cut too.”

“Crown Prince-nim was doing perfectly fine on his own! Because of Ren-nim’s charge, Crown Prince-nim had to cancel his skill!”

“Haa, this is why you can’t party with people from Panan continent.”

“Sorry. It’s all my fault. I have no excuse.”

Ah, so that was it. I smirked. Dungeon explorers were people too. Most of them did nothing to contribute in the raid, and they must have felt bothered by it on the inside. It was a case of inferiority complex.

In that situation, however, someone who was worse than them appeared: Ren. Although he was eager and passionate, his actions almost led to the party being wiped.

These people just wanted to gain self-satisfaction by confirming that there was someone who was worse than them. They were telling themselves that they were better than that person. That they had more qualification.

It was truly laughable.

What really surprised me was Ren. Unlike the fiery temperament he showed in battle, he fully acknowledged his faults and was bowing his head in apology. Although it wasn't particularly commendable, most people in his place lashed out rather than apologize. He left a favorable impression on me. Since I also thought differently, I decided to cut in.

“Sorry. I should have told everyone about Lizard Knight's skill. Because of my hubris that I could stop it easily, I forgot. It's my fault. I apologize.”

“N-No! Crown Prince-nim did fantastic given the circumstances!”

“That's right! We could only beat the Lizard Knight thanks to Crown Prince-nim!”

“Ren-nim, you realize Crown Prince-nim is trying to cover for your mistakes, right?”

“Kuk... I apologize, your highness Crown Prince.”

“No, I'm not a crown prince. Don't naturally treat me like royalty!”

Thanks to me, the party members that were scolding Ren calmed down and left with their rewards. Even though Ren made the great contribution of almost cutting the Lizard Knight's tail, because of a crucial mistake that led party members to their death, his final

contribution was the lowest. As such, he held a Middle Potion and wore a melancholic expression. Middle Potion... I had only grabbed that thing once...

Ren clenched the hand with the Middle Potion and murmured as he trembled.

“Damn it, whenever I enter a battle, I...!”

“You can think calmly in normal situations, but you become hotheaded in battle, right?”

“Eh?”

Ren looked at me with blank eyes.

“You want to challenge even though you know the taste of losing. You want to surpass those stronger than you. Because you don’t want to lose, you do your best, or even bluff. Even when you end up becoming a mess and feel self-loathing, you can’t stop yourself from doing it again.”

“T-That’s right! How did you know?”

“That’s simple.”

I was once like that. Answering him with that, I smiled at Ren. Excited, Ren jumped at me.

“H-How can I fix it?”

“That’s even simpler. Do you want to fix it?”

“Of course! I’m the Panan continent’s only hope. Whether it’s for those that died or for Sir Lebuik who chose me to become the dungeon explorer rather than other talented young men, I have to get stronger!”

“I see. I like your determination. I think I can be of help.”

I wanted one too, hehe. With all the new abilities I’d gathered, I wanted to organize them. Although fighting against monsters was nice, beating up... I mean, sparring with someone strong was also good. I nodded my head in satisfaction and took out the Silver Spear I just got.

“Alright, fight with me first. You’ll find your answer then.”

“Ooooh! Thank you, thank you! Crown Prince really is different!”

“Not really. You won’t thank me for long.”

“No, I will thank you from the bottom of my heart!”

You really won’t. Even as I murmured that, I smiled kindly. Just like that, I obtained a sturdy sandb... I mean, sparring partner.

\*

“I hate you.”

Ren, who was collapsed on the ground, blurted out with malice. He was still alive, surprisingly. Sipping on Loretta’s Fatigue Recovery Juice, I answered him.

“I told you, you won’t thank me for long.”

“I thought you’d really kill me!”

“Without killing intent in your spear, how can you expect your enemy to bring out his all?”

I plugged a Fatigue Recovery Juice in Ren’s mouth as well. Ren began to immediately suck it down.

Loretta, who was watching me blankly from the side, asked.

“Customer, you know you can’t dispose corpses at my shop, right?”

“He’s not dead yet, don’t worry.”

“Cough!”

Ren coughed out the juice he was drinking. It was a joke... but Ren seemed to have thought otherwise. I crouched down next to Ren.

“So? Do you feel better after the spar?”

“Huh?”

“You were attacking me with a do-or-die attitude just now, but you’re not now.”

“That’s because I’m all out of energy.”

He was panting like he was about to die. However, his eyes were blazing even now. I liked it. He was just like me.

“So you’re saying, once you get your energy back, you’ll come at me again.”

“That’s right. I really can’t do anything about my competitive instinct.”

“Don’t worry. It’ll get fixed soon. Give it a month.”

“That’s a rather specific number.”



“That’s how long it took for father to fix my bad habits.”

With a refreshing smile, I answered Ren as I reminisced about the old days. It was when I was 14 years old. I had just dominated the friendly match competition against other martial arts clans’ heirs and was feeling overly self-confident. I believed there was no one I couldn’t defeat. It was also the time when I pestered father to quickly let me become a dungeon explorer.

I still remembered it clearly. Father laughed, and staring into the sky, murmured, ‘so it’s that time for you too.’

That afternoon, I sparred with father. He beat me up into oblivion. Really. From head to toe, the only place where his wooden spear didn’t hit were my testicles. Feeling spiteful, I challenged him again and again, like a moth to a flame. Father didn’t go easy just because I was his son and really beat me up. He really was childish in that respect.

That continued for a month.

“And during that one month, I learned not to charge at the enemy directly, but to take my time and analyze the opponent. I learned how to wait for an opening to strike, and learned that it was always better to go for a gap in defense than to fight head on.”

“Apparently, people from my lineage always had a phase where our strength went over our heads. During this period, whoever our teacher was had to beat us to discipline us. Because the teachers thrashed us so much, we called it the thrashing phase.”

When I first heard father talk about the thrashing phase, I felt it made great sense. However, Loretta who was listening from the side seemed to disagree.

“Customer’s father really is stupid. I didn’t think there could be a stupider person than customer in the world...”

“Like father like son...”

“Ren, if you’ve recovered enough to spout nonsense, you should be ready to go for a second round. Ah, we’re going on another Lizard Knight raid in an hour too.”

“Eh? Raid? How?”

Ren tilted his head and asked. I was about to ask why he was asking such a stupid question, but realized that Ren did not know about the battle vouchers. When I looked at Loretta, she answered Ren’s question.

“Customer, do you wish to fight the Lizard Knight again?”

“T-There’s a way to do that? Of course I do! I’m Panan’s Ren. If I don’t get my revenge on the Lizard Knight, I will not be me anymore! I can only get stronger if I overcome him!”

“How about it, Loretta? He seems to have the qualifications you

were talking about.”

That’s what I liked about him in the first place. His fiery nature that was unlike other dungeon explorers. Of course, if I didn’t think he had talent, I would have just thought he was stupid.

When I asked Loretta with a wink, Loretta flushed her cheeks and dodged my gaze. Eh? Did I do something wrong just now?

“K-Kuhum. Fine. Although he doesn’t quite meet my standards, since cus... since Shin-nim is with him, I’ll sell it.”

“Sell? Sell what?”

Ren tilted his head and asked with a naïve expression. Loretta beamed as she took out a handful of battle vouchers. Then, as usual, she said her sales line.

“The Floor Master Battle Voucher! Allowing you to overcome the limit of once per day fight and rechallenge the Floor Master! If you buy it now, you can get them for 4,000 gold each! Just 4,000 gold each, customer!”

You scammer!

## Chapter 38. Event Dungeon (1)

---

Ren bought the battle vouchers in bulk. He seemed to be the same type of person as me, as he preferred not to buy equipment or consumables. As a result, he had gathered quite a bit of gold. Even as he used all of it up because he met the wrong person, he did not seem to mind.

A look of resolve could be seen on his face.

“I finally met someone who would put in effort for me. If I don’t believe in you, I don’t deserve to call myself Ren!”

Did Ren have to put in an exclamation mark every other sentence? He really was hotheaded.

“Kuk... Take it, shopkeeper. In exchange, I’ll take those vouchers!”

“Yes, yes. Thank you, customer. Come again!”

The scene of Ren buying battle vouchers looked like exchanging money for chips at a casino. Luckily, with me around, he would always hit the jackpot.

“Loretta, I’m almost out of battle vouchers too. Can you give me 30 more?”

“Yes, Shin-nim. 30, right? That will be 70,000 gold total.”

Strange. For some reason, the discount rate was higher for me. I was thankful for it but unfortunately, Ren picked up on her words.

“Eh? Shopkeeper, isn’t the number wrong? 30 vouchers should be...”

“Customer, it’s 70,000 gold. For Shin-nim, that is.”

Loretta exerted an intimidating aura with a smile. However, that wasn’t enough to prevent stupid Ren.

“Then, shouldn’t you give it to me for that price too? I gave you 4,000 gold per voucher.”

“Huu. It seems customer isn’t very knowledgeable about the Floor Shop yet.”

“What do you mean? Shouldn’t the price be the same?”

Loretta stared at Ren with her smile, then laughed. Her smile was so scary that I was afraid it would appear in my dreams.

“Shin-nim is a premium member, and premium members can buy items for a cheaper price. Do you understand? As expected of someone Shin-nim brought, you are dense.”

“Mmm? Premium? So that was it...”

No, there's no such thing. I've never heard of it before either.

Wanting to make the two idiots stop talking, I quickly took out the gold.

“Here, 70,000 gold. As always, thank you, Loretta.”

“... Hurry up and go do your raid. Being thanked by Shin-nim gives me chills.”

Like the saying went, women's hearts were as fickle as the weather. After she happily sold battle vouchers for a cheap price, Loretta's mood seemed to have turned for the worse as she tried to chase me away with a flushed face. Dejected, I left the Floor Shop wondering if a day would come when Loretta and I would be totally unreserved around each other. Suddenly, Ren asked me a question.

“Are you dating the shopkeeper?”

It took me a moment to process what he said. After standing around as if I suffered from a lag, I barely managed to reply.

“... What?”

“No matter how I look at it, that was a lover's quarrel.”

Our conversation from just now? I suddenly thought of a possibility. Ren certainly had a masculine face and a healthy body. But...

“Ren, have you been single your entire life?”

“H-How did you know?”

I was right. I could tell because I was the same. Damn it, I didn't want to relate to him like this!

“You think any man and woman talking friendly are in a relationship, right?”

“Huk!”

“If you see a girl staring at you, you fix your hair and think about what to say when she starts walking toward you, right?”

“Huk!”

I planned to continuously tease Ren as we walked to the boss room. But because I felt like I was tormenting myself, I stopped.

Although I didn't tell Ren yet, only he and I would be fighting the boss. To completely crush his overly competitive spirit, just sparring with me wasn't enough. Plus, I had to take lesson fees as

well. I couldn't work for free, could I?

That's why...

“Lion Striiiiike!”

“That idiot's doing it again.”

“Shishik! Die, Human!”

Ren who was in charge of the Lizard Knight's backside bravely lunged at Lizard Knight's tail flying toward him. I was like Sancho Panza watching Don Quixote [tilting at windmills](#). With a wishful expression, I prayed for him to return alive. At the same time, I stabbed the Lizard Knight with my Silver Spear to prevent him from focusing on his tail.

Tilting at windmills – attacking imaginary enemies

“Kuaaak, Human!”

“Yeah, I'm a human!”

After the Lizard Knight sent Ren flying, he rushed toward me. I first threw him off with a light sidestep, and made him fall by making him trip on my spear. Then, I stabbed at his neck. Although my spear carried bountiful mana, it was only enough to break a few scales and damage him lightly. As expected of a Floor Master. His defense was nothing to scoff at.



“Kuak!”

“Whoa, don’t suddenly get up! You almost scared the crap out of me!”

I quickly jumped back and dodged his counterattack. Whenever I saw an opening, I attacked him. This fast-paced switch between offense and defense continued until the Lizard Knight raised his spear to use his earthquake attack. This time, either because he received a bigger shock or because there were no healers to help him, Ren had not gotten up. As such, I was able to smoothly use Tempest to send the Lizard Knight’s spear flying.

“Kuk!”

“If you lost your weapon, you need to attack me without it! Don’t just stand around! No, wait, why am I lecturing you, not Ren!?”

It was a piece of cake to toy with the Lizard Knight who had lost his spear. This time, I didn’t even give him the opportunity to use Dragon Skin.

Once when I defeated it alone and once when I defeated with party members. Using these two opportunities, I memorized the change in his stance when he was about to use Dragon Skin. Now, whenever I saw him getting into that stance, I delivered a critical blow to prevent him from using Dragon Skin.

It was only later that I found out it had a technical term called Skill Cancelling. Ellos, who explained it to me, blabbered on about it being a legendary secret technique or whatever, but I had long stopped listening to him.

“Kuaaak! A mere human dares to attack this Lizard Knight! Kuk!”

“For a lizard, you sure know how to talk.”

After piercing his neck with Heroic Strike added with Divine Speed, I murmured leisurely. I called Ren who was sent flying after being unable stop himself from charging at the Lizard Knight’s tail.

“It’s over, so get up!”

“Ku.... I-I hit my head.”

“At least you’re tough. I was thinking I liked the feeling I was getting in my hand...”

“Can you repeat that?”

“Wow, look at the rewards!”

I blatantly ignored Ren’s question and looked at the reward list with just two items. Then, I unconsciously grinned from ear to ear. The item I was waiting for had finally appeared.

[1. Muscle Strengthening Elixir

2. Lizard Knight's Iron Boots]

In the second raid, where I brought in nine other people, I wondered why an elixir-type item did not drop. Until now, no matter how badly the other people did, my achievements were enough to make elixir items drop. However, that wasn't the case for the second Lizard Knight raid. I wondered what I was missing.

The answer was simple. I wasn't missing anything. In fact, I had too many. Too many of what you ask?

People. It was people. With four people dying, there were only 6 of us left to get rewards. Even then, we had too many people to bring out a rare item. The solution was simple. I just had to lower the number even more.

What caught my attention then was Ren. He had the guts to pounce on a Floor Master, and he had the strength to back it up. Of course, he was still a problematic explorer who was lacking in techniques. This time, my brain was uncharacteristically clever. I formed a plan where both Ren and I benefitted.

“Alright, Ren. I'll take the reward as promised.”

“Uuu, I do have a net gain of 1,000 gold, but...”

“It’s the lesson fee.”

After taking the Muscle Strengthening Elixir, I received the Iron Boots from Ren. Ren bought Floor Master Battle Vouchers for 4,000 gold each. With the 5,000 gold he gained from the raid, he was earning 1,000 gold without doing much of anything. Not to mention, I was personally training him and preventing him from dying.

As for me, I could shorten my Floor Master grind by receiving two rewards every time. It really was the perfect plan.

There was only one thing I didn’t take into consideration. It was that Loretta would sell the battle vouchers for 4,000 gold. I expected Ren to make 2,000 gold, but now that he was only earning 1,000 gold, it felt a bit weird. Of course, since we would be doing the raid three times per day, he would be making 3,000 gold in total.

“3,000 gold is certainly not a small amount... with personal training from the Crown Prince on top...”

“3,000 gold per day plus personal training from me. Isn’t it great, Ren?”

“Hm. I have a lot to say, but I don’t quite know how to put it into words. Agh, my sides hurt.”

“You reap what you sow.”

I swallowed the Muscle Strengthening Elixir like candy. For a moment, I was worried that my muscles would bulge out like before. Thankfully, nothing of the sort happened. The moment I ate the elixir, I felt every muscle in my body tighten like they were being squeezed. Then, a fiery heat spread out across my body in an instant, followed by a wave of exhaustion.

[Every muscle in your body becomes tougher and stronger. Strength and dexterity both increase by 1.]

Nice! Two stats increased at the same time. With this, I could get stronger once again. Excited, I urged Ren on.

“Alright, let’s go do our final raid for the day.”

At my words, Ren paled and his lips trembled.

“You... Are you human?”

“Hm? What’s wrong? What happened to your spirit from earlier, Ren?”

“My entire body hurts! It hurts too much!”

Ren had an extremely desperate expression. He was finally wearing an expression befitting of his young face. With a calm smile, I consoled him.

“That’s why I said I would massage you well.”

“Aaak! Crown Prince is murdering a dungeon explorer!”

“Hahaha, you’re free to enter, but not free to leave.”

Like this, the curtains were raised to our fun party raid.

## Chapter 39. Event Dungeon (2)

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Midterms ended. I had no classes on Fridays, so Thursday was the last day of my midterms. It was also the class I happened to share with Su Ye-Eun.

I vaguely thought she'd hit me up to go eat fries again. Since I started having classes with Su Ye-Eun, I started avoiding food with potatoes.

“Let's celebrate the end of midterms with beer and fries!”

“I expected nothing less.”

“Let's go, Shin!”

“How did the test go?”

“Kyaaaak!”

Su Ye-Eun answered my question with a scream. How did this girl get into college?

‘Something always happens when I eat fries with this girl...’

When the communication channel opened last time, I was almost scared out of my wits. It was almost like it happened because I went to eat fries with her. In a displeased tone, I asked Su Ye-Eun.

“Don’t you have any friends other than me? Anyone you have classes with?”

“N-No one talks to me.”

“Then stop always wearing your hoody.”

With the hoody covering her face, Su Ye-Eun’s presence disappeared completely. I almost thought it was some passive skill. With her pretty face, people would be all over her if she just dressed up a little...

“I hate getting attention.”

“You really have a tiresome personality.”

“It’s fine, I have you.”

“...”

For a moment, I saw tentacles with suction cups stretching out from her body and wrapping around me. Was I caught in a trap? By this zero social skills, zero presence, monsterphobia, potato witch?

“Come on, let’s go!”



“Yeah, yeah, I’m coming.”

They said words sowed seeds. I didn’t believe in it, but I decided to believe it from today. When I was taking a breath after ordering a beer and fries, the TV on the wall was showing a strange place.

It was suspicious. I began to hate this shop famous for its fries.

[Breaking news. At a shopping mall in Seoul’s Yeongdeungpo District, a black pillar of light suddenly shot up to the sky. This phenomenon which was first seen two minutes ago is also being observed in other countries’ main cities...]

On TV, I saw a shopping mall I visited in the past totally enveloped by black light. As if that wasn’t enough, the black light was shooting up into the sky, forming a pillar visible from quite a distance away. There were also images from major cities in other countries. Japan’s Osaka, America’s New York, China’s Beijing, Britain’s London, etc. They were all large cities with huge population densities.

[Experts consider this phenomenon as a continuation of Two Moon, and have advised governments to dispatch Guardian to affected areas. According to Article 7 Section 1 of New Moon Act, the government has begun to evacuate all Yeongdeungpo District residents and has dispatched Guardian’s Special Forces.]

New Moon Act. It was a law created after Two Moon to deal with monsters and monster-related work. It outlined the government's response when a monster-related disaster occurred. For example, the code of conduct, safety measures for citizens, and federal assistance for any material damage received.

Although it had many faults and led to endless protests, it was still convenient in times of crisis like this.

“S-Scary... Right?”

“Hmm. I wonder what it is.”

Black light. Major cities.

Just looking at them through the TV screen, I could feel the ominous aura emanating from them. However, I knew what those lights were. That was the feeling I had.

“Dungeons.”

“Shin, did you say something?”

“Hm? Did I say something?”

Su Ye-Eun looked at me like I was acting strangely.

“[Didn't you just say something about pancakes](#)? I like pancakes too.”

The ‘geon’ in dungeon sounds like the word for pancake

“Pancakes? What pancakes? I’m not in the mood to eat. In fact, I think I have to go to the... dungeon.”

“Hm?”

“Dungeon!”

I shouted out loud. As if in response, the black light shooting up from the shopping mall subsided and revealed the building’s appearance. No, it was wrong to say it was a building. It was a whirlpool of black smoke emanating an ominous aura. It was just like teleportation portals in games!

At the same time, I heard message noona’s voice in my head. She’d been making a lot of business trips recently.

[Event Dungeons have been created on Earth! When cleared, you can obtain various rewards such as stat points or skill points!]

All Awakened on Earth likely thought this: It's finally here.

All dungeon explorers on Earth likely thought this: Those are Event Dungeons!?

I quickly opened the communication channel. Sure enough, Mastiford was chatting away in it.

[You all heard it right? Those are Event Dungeons!]

[Unni, you're going to go?]

[Of course! You should come with me, Sumire!]

[B-But...]

[If you die in an Event Dungeon, aren't you dead for real?]

At Edward Walker's words, the two girls became quiet. I was thinking the same thing, even if it was something I did not really want to admit.

This world was different from the dungeon. We were not given second chances.

As such, adventuring had a danger incomparable to losing a week's worth of time.

[These Event Dungeons are dangerous. I can smell it. The sweeter the reward, the more lethal the poison they bear.]

[Then are you just going to leave them be? The rewards will disappear if other Awakened clear them. Are you that much of a scaredy-cat? How can you call yourself a British citizen?]

[Shut it, Mastiford. I don't see what that's got to do with it. Me being British has nothing to do with acting like a fool who doesn't know fear.]

Well said, Mister Walker!

[The dungeons we've been going to until now were like games. There was no risk involved. Although being hit by monsters may have hurt, you were guaranteed your lives. And when you won, you were guaranteed rewards. But not now. It's a gamble with your life on the line. No matter how sweet the reward seems, it's not worth it.]

[Ho, you're more prudent than I imagined, or should I say cowardly? Shouldn't a man charge in no matter how dangerous it is and come out victorious!?!]

Father, who had fought against a tiger barehanded and won, had the right to say that. That said, I won't forgive him for making me fight one when I was only 13 years old! Even if I won in the end!

[Hmph, are you saying you'll go into those dungeons?]

[Think about it. I'm not active yet as an ability user. If I go into a dungeon, I would be advertising to the whole world that I'm an ability user.]

[So you were just talk after all.]

[... You, do you want to make a trip to Korea? I'll welcome you wholeheartedly. With my spear, that is.]

Father... I felt I needed to interfere before father started fighting Walker. I also needed to point out something everyone was missing.

[Sorry everyone, but before we talk about the benefits we can gain as dungeon explorers, there's something important we need to address.]

[Ah, Yeon Hwawoo! Great! Why did you ignore me until now!? I've been calling you for a while!]

[Hm? I had the communication channel turned off, why?]

[Ugggaaaah! How annoying!]

I ignored Mastiford's screaming and continued.

[You guys know what happens when you clear an Event Dungeon, right?]

[I haven't entered one before, but I've heard about it.]

[Ah, I've cleared it before. Huhu, twice in fact! And for one of them, an Event Raid hap... Ah!]

Mastiford who was excitedly bragging cried out in shock. It seemed everyone had an idea what I was trying to say.

[The Event Raid... You're right.]

[That's right. I remember now.]

Eh? Father, you're on the 21st floor now!? I didn't think he'd catch up to me so quickly. Though, as I was completely into raising my stats through the Muscle Strengthening Elixir, I didn't pay much attention to leveling up.

[That's right. If we rashly clear one, a raid boss might appear and make the situation worse. We need to come up with a solution before we do anything.]

[Hmm, but even if we don't do anything, wouldn't the Awakened be dispatched?]

[That's true... Mastiford, didn't you brag about being a SS-rank

ability user with public trust? This is your opportunity to shine. Send the world a warning.]

[Mmm, I'll try. I'll try but... I don't really have much power, you know? Britain has another SS-rank ability user so my words won't have much weight. Plus, Korea isn't a powerful country. This is exactly why I wanted to create an organization of dungeon explorers!]

[Miss Mastiford, I'm saying you should use your personal authority as a SS-rank ability user. Don't you understand the weight your words carry? Don't talk to the government, talk to the mass media! You can even hold a press conference if you want. We need to prepare the entire world, whether we clear the dungeon or not!]

[E-Even if you suddenly compliment me, I can't do anything! Hmph!]

[Unni...]

As I was chatting in the communication channel, I naturally had my hand over my mouth. Su Ye-Eun, who had three fries sticking out of her mouth, was staring at me like I was the weird one. I ignored her gaze and turned to the TV. There, I saw a letter written on top of the Dungeon Gate. It was undoubtedly the letter 'A'!

[Mister Walker, if you knew what difficulty the Event Dungeon you had to enter was, what would you do?]



[I would still hesitate. That said, given that I have some information about the dungeon, I could prepare myself to challenge it. Compared to the huge danger I would have to eventually face, overcoming the current smaller danger would have some merit.]

[Good. Korea's Event Dungeon Gate has the letter 'A' above it. I think this is like the rank that classifies ability users. How about other countries?]

At my words, everyone became quiet. Sumire was the first to respond.

[It's true! Osaka Castle's Gate says B+!]

[The entire Osaka Castle disappeared!? I wanted to go see it eventually!]

[That's not important right now, Miss Mastiford!]

[Hey, you stop picking faults at whatever I say. I'm at my mom's house right now, so I can only see Yeungdeungpo's Gate! I'm a Yeundeungpo resident too!]

'Like I care! Turn on your TV and look at the other countries! I'm in a place where I can't even change the TV channel!' I growled at her in my head.

[I confirmed it. Britain's Event Dungeon says A+. It seems America's Event Dungeon is S.]

[Hm. France has B, China has C. Although China has the lowest difficulty, five Event Dungeons appeared there. 3 Cs and 2 C+s.]

If the alphabet above the Gates were really based on ability users' rankings like I thought, wouldn't a single S-rank ability user be enough to clear a S-rank dungeon? Wasn't solo play the standard for all dungeons?

[Huu, this is hard. If you consider a 10-man party as the standard... No, since you can't quit and come out like in the dungeons we go to, we'll have to consider at least 20 people for taking shifts. Since they don't have inventories like us, we'll need to add 5 more people to carry daily necessities. That's 25. Even if porters can be low-rank ability users, wouldn't America's S-rank dungeon need 20 S-rank ability users? That'll be difficult.]

[There's a possibility that only 10 people can enter a dungeon. In that case, we'll need ability users with higher ranks than the dungeon itself.]

I decided to stay quiet. Although I was also a dungeon explorer, the amount of common sense knowledge I knew seemed light years apart from theirs. Not to mention, not all ability users on Earth were dungeon explorers.

[Plus, if an S-rank raid boss appears, we'll need at least 100 to 300 people to come out victorious. That'll be a disaster among

disasters.]

[Now that you put it that way, Yeungdeungpo's boss would be A-rank too...]

Mastiford seemed to be immersed in her thoughts, when she suddenly said,

[Everyone, I need your help. My mom's feeling uneasy. I want to get rid of the dungeon quickly and calm her down. Help me beat this dungeon. As a magician, although I have strong firepower, I'll be taken out if I leave any openings. I can't do it alone.]

... Just like I thought from the beginning, she was honest. People usually found it hard to acknowledge their weaknesses. For someone like Mastiford who seemed like a blob of self-esteem, I didn't think she would so easily admit her weakness. Right now, she not only revealed it, but she was also asking for help. It meant she knew her weaknesses just as much as her strengths. I began to see her in a more favorable light.

Plus, I knew she really liked her mother.

[I refuse. There's no reason for me to put myself at risk.]

Edward Walker was the first to answer. In a way, it was the logical answer. On the other hand, Minami's answer was the complete opposite of Walker's.

[I'll help, unni. I'll fly to Korea right now! I have confidence in my defense, so I can withstand most attacks!]

[Sumire! Thank you, I love you!]

That girl was still too kind. She should really think things through a bit more.

[Miss Minami, I'm not trying to be condescending, but I don't think a explorer on the 18th floor can take on an A-rank monster.]

[Y-You're right, but I have confidence in my defense! I can even take a Floor Master's attack head on!]

[Really?]

This young lady was certainly not normal. Climbing 18 floors in 2 years, plus... Eh? 2 years? There were 5 dungeon explorers right now, and there were 5 dungeon explorers when I became one 5 years ago... A question emerged in my mind. But now was not the time to ask. I reluctantly put it away in the back of my mind.

[Miss Mastiford, what are our plans if a raid boss appears when we clear the dungeon?]

[Don't worry. I have an SS-rank firepower. If I'm properly protected, I can deal with an A-rank raid boss by myself.]

With that, I made my decision.

[I'll participate too. Although I might be lacking, I can at least protect Miss Mastiford.]

[W-What's up with you suddenly? What are you scheming? Is it the stats? Is that what you're aiming for?]

[That one thing. More importantly, I'm confident I won't die in an A-rank dungeon. Plus, if someone can guarantee to kill the raid boss without suffering losses, it would only be proper to lend a hand to the person capable of doing it.]

Objectively, I assessed my ability to be about B+ rank. Of course, that was only taking Peika's ability into account. Adding on my physical strength and techniques, plus my abilities as a dungeon explorer... I was probably A-rank. Even without my spear that is.

[Hmph! Even if you change your mind now, I won't put you in our organization!]

[I don't want to go in your organization, you witch.]

[W-Witch!?!]

[I'll cooperate too. Since my so... I mean, since Yeon Hwawoo is cooperating, it's only proper as a fellow Korean to join in.]

‘Just say the word son, father!’ I complained in my head. That said, father seemed to be worried about sending his son to such a dangerous place alone as he also joined in.

But do dungeon explorers have to be the ones to go?

[Miss Mastiford, you’re a SS-rank ability user. Why can’t you just bring other ability users instead?]

[What other ability users? Do you think people would choose to barge into a suspicious and dangerous place like that without receiving any rewards?]

[An SS-rank ability user’s name doesn’t even have that much weight?]

After hearing what I said, Mastiford let out a deep sigh.

[You see, British Guardians are busy with the Gate that appeared in London. Korean Guardians would be all over me, but I’m afraid of the aftermath.]

[Aftermath? Ah.]

The scene of Mastiford entering Korea’s Gate with other Korean ability users would be the perfect advertisement for the proud Korean image the government was trying to sell. Once I understood, I nodded my head instinctively.

[Even though we're doing a good thing, we have to sneak into the Gate. Do you understand, Yeon Hwawoo?]

[Yeah, I got it. You have it rough, Miss Mastiford.]

[Thanks for noti... wait, why am I talking so friendly with you!?!]

Mastiford suddenly yelled after talking well for a while. Reaffirming that this woman wasn't normal, I shook my head. At the same time, Mastiford put the conversation to rest.

[Then we'll gather in front of that shopping mall in two hours!]

[That's too fast! Miss Minami has to fly over from Japan! I know you want to take care of the dungeon as fast as possible, but calm down.]

[Ah, you're right... Then 2 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.]

[Fine.]

[Got it, unni!]

[That's fine with me.]

[Ho? The four of you are gathering? Yeon Hwawoo, I thought

you'd be different... well, good luck.]

With that, Walker went silent. It seems he turned off the communication channel.

[I'm off too. I'll be there on time so don't worry.]

[W-Who'd worry for you!? Ah, wait, you're about to turn the communication channel off, right? Don't-!]

I turned it off. Letting out all the tension I built up with a sigh, I gulped down on lukewarm beer in front of me. At the same time, I caught sight of Su Ye-Eun staring at me strangely.

“What's wrong, Shin? You seem to be trembling.”

“I'm just nervous. It looks like I'll be doing something dangerous.”

I stared at the Gate on TV. A whirlpool of grey smoke. Although Mastiford didn't say much about it, I still had a lot on my mind.

It was different from the dungeon.

If I died, that was it.

Wouldn't they be fine even without me?



“Tsk. I can’t turn tail in front of just this much danger.”

It had been a while since I thought about it, but I remembered.

The superhero I dreamt of becoming when I was a little kid was not a coward. From the dungeon, I learned that a coward cannot get stronger. If everything ended when I died, I just had to not die.

What was the reason I raised my strength in the dungeon? Before monsters began appearing on Earth, it was to see just how far I could go. I also wanted to know what was at the end of the dungeon. That was the same even now when monsters began appearing on Earth.

Until now, I ignored Earth’s monsters because I could not gain skills or level up from hunting them.

It was different now. If that dungeon’s difficulty really was based on A-rank ability users, then it was worth taking it on with my current strength. If things went badly with that dungeon, there was the possibility that ordinary people, not ability users, would die. Just like when the second moon first rose in the skies.

“Though, I only said I’d go because I was confident I wouldn’t die.”

“D-Die? It’s that dangerous?”

“Like I said, I won’t die.”

I wasn’t a saint. I had no plans to throw my life away for someone I didn’t even know. But Yeungdeungpo wasn’t that far from here. If a raid boss appeared, it was possible that someone I cared about would get hurt. I had to prevent that at all costs.

... Most importantly, there were rewards in that dungeon. Although it was only temporary, I had an SS-rank ability user in my party! It would be hard to find another opportunity to leech rewards so easily! Whoops, my real intentions were leaking.

“Huhu, huhuhu.”

“D-Don’t suddenly laugh. It’s scary...”

“Ah, the world is vast and there are truly lots of things to grind.”

I’ll get stronger! Overcoming danger and getting stronger from it is what excites people! Thinking that, I tightly clenched my fists. Although I sneered at father’s simple personality, I had yet to realize I was just like him in the most crucial area.

“I should really take you to the doctor... Uuu, I’m worried.”

“You mind your own business!”

## Chapter 40. Event Dungeon (3)

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“That’s right, Shin-nim.”

As if she had been waiting for my question, Loretta nodded her head.

“The Gates are certainly marked according to Earth’s standard for ability users. An ‘A’ marked dungeon would mean A-rank ability users could take care of it.”

“So it really is as I thought. I’m curious how you know about it, but I won’t ask for now.”

“Even if you do, I’m unable to give you an answer. But I can tell you this, Shin-nim. That place is a dungeon, yet not a dungeon. If something goes wrong...”

Seeing Loretta’s worried expression, I nodded my head with a bitter smile.

“I know it’s dangerous, but I have confidence. I have strong reinforcements as well. Thanks for worrying about me.”

“Haa, I still have misgivings... but it’s not like I can go with you, huu.”

“More importantly, there’s something I want to buy. Do you sell

masks? Something that can completely hide my appearance.”

“I do. A mask that prevents others from reading your information and even slightly changes your height, build, and hair. It’s called ‘Otus’ Secret.’ Today, this amazing magical item is only 50,000 gold!”

“50,000!”

That’s over 100 million won! Well... it’s probably going to come in handy from now on. There was a huge merit to being able to act as an ability user while hiding my face. Whenever an Event Raid occurred, it would let me participate without revealing my identity. That way, I could act without reserve.

I bought the mask with tearful eyes. I messaged father while I was at it. We of course had each other on our friend lists.

“Father, buy Otus’ Secret from the Floor Shop.”

[Hm? What’s that?]

“It’s a mask. Are you going to reveal your face?”

[Mm, I was going to tell you later, but I registered as an ability user today.]

“You act too quickly!”

I remembered the talk father had with Walker not long ago. Although I thought he was rather calm about it, it seemed he fell for Walker's provocation. He was my father, but he really was simple.

[My ability has grown quite a bit too now. I can't stay hidden forever, so I registered as an ability user and ignored the requests from Guardian and Freedom Wing. Huhu, I'm an A-rank ability user now!]

"Congratulations on getting A-rank, but you could have registered with your identity hidden, father."

It was true. Many rogues who did not want to join Guardian or Freedom Wing disguised themselves when they registered as ability users. What was important for ability users were their abilities, not their faces.

That said, compared to Guardian, who were officially recognized by the government, or the worldwide organization Freedom Wing, who had their own independent system, rogues were a lot less trustworthy. They were also unable to enjoy the benefits other ability users had such as tax cuts, memberships to government facilities, or free entrance to certain public and private facilities.

Simply put, they were things I didn't care about.

[Eh? Really? Well, it's too late for that.]

“Huu. Well, I’m only going to be fighting barehanded tomorrow. Also, don’t make it obvious that we are father and son.”

[Shouldn’t you take this opportunity to register as well?]

“I will. With my mask on. I’m still not confident in my ability, so I don’t plan on revealing myself so openly.”

[A man shouldn’t be so spineless.]

“It’s being cautious.”

[My stupid son has grown so much...]

Thinking that my father’s intelligence stat couldn’t be that high, I purchased Otus’ Secret. It was a black, metallic mask that covered my forehead, eyes, and even my nasal bridge completely. However, I felt that it wasn’t perfect.

“Won’t I get discovered? It doesn’t hide my mouth or jaw line.”

“Like I said, it changes your build. Try wearing it first, Shin-nim.”

When I equipped the mask and imagined myself getting slimmer, my body really did get slimmer. Plus, my height, which had reduced to 190cm with all the Bone Compressing Elixirs I

consumed, reduced further to about 185cm. My hair then became a little longer and was dyed grey. My appearance really did change according to my imagination.

Loretta who was watching from the side suddenly laughed. I didn't like the way her eyes curved to a crescent shape.

“Shin-nim, is that Shin-nim's ideal form?”

“Uk!? N-No! I only dyed my hair grey so my identity wouldn't get revealed!”

“Yes, I believe you. Wow, how cool. I might fall in love with you.”

“You're talking in monotone!”

I had to admit Loretta got me there. Just as I vowed to get my revenge one day and took my mask off, someone shot me a question.

“Are we not doing any more raids today?”

It was Ren, who was quietly watching Loretta make fun of me. After two weeks of fighting the Lizard Knight 3 times every day, Ren charged at the Lizard Knight's tail much less than when we began. I had also collected all of the Lizard Knight set, and only needed a few more Muscle Strengthening Elixirs.

By the way, the Lizard Knight Set was a plate armor set with much better effects than the leather armor. It raised strength and constitution by 10 points, and allowed me to use 'Dragon Skin', the ultimate defense skill that reduced incoming physical and magical damage by 90 percent.

Of course, it was not completely effective against attacks from enemies that exceeded a certain level. In addition, it reduced my movement speed by 50 percent. However, it was still an amazing skill. Becoming tougher meant that my attacks became stronger as well. I stored this skill on the 4 o'clock position of the pocket watch.

"Mm, I like that the gauntlet is metal. I didn't really like the leather glove."

"Hey, Crown Prince. I asked if we were done for the day?"

"Of course not, Ren. We still have one more raid to do."

"Kuk, my back hurts though."

"Please, we both know you're going to go wild once the raid begins."

After making Ren shut up, I checked myself out one last time. Metal armor and mask. Although they weren't really a good combination, it didn't matter. I was exploring the dungeon, not



going on a fashion show.

“Loretta, wish me luck so that I can come back safe.”

“... If it's Shin-nim, I believe you can crawl up from even the deepest depths of hell.”

“Haa, can't you just say 'come back safely'? You don't have to exaggerate so much.”

“Uuk! Come back safely. I won't forgive you if you come back hurt! There, happy!?”

If you say that in an angry tone, it doesn't sound sincere!

The next day, I decided to leave early in the morning. I equipped Otus' Secret and wore the most formal attire I owned, the Wraith Queen Set. When I looked at myself in the mirror, I had to admit that I looked great. Although I was thankful that I had grown slimmer by consuming Compressing Elixirs, I wished I had become a bit slimmer, just like how I looked right now. Until I was 16, I had enough muscles for orcs to call me big brother. As such, I always yearned to become slimmer.

When I went out to the living room, Yua, who was drinking milk, found me and tilted her head.

“Oppa, why are you wearing a mask?”

“Mm, oppa is going to go register as an ability user today.”

“Really!?”

Yua’s eyes sparkled at my words.

“Then can I brag about oppa to my friends?”

“Eh? Mm... As you can see from the mask I’m wearing, I’m registering under a fake name. Sorry, but can you wait a bit longer?”

“Ei... Okay. I wanted to brag about oppa.”

Watching Yua murmuring with lingering attachment, I patted her head. She quickly cheered up and saw me off. If she knew that I was going to clear a dungeon that appeared on Earth, she would be crying and trying her best to prevent me from going. For that reason, I didn’t tell her anything about it.

As I walked on the sidewalk, I could feel the gazes of people passing by. With the rather fancy Wraith Queen Set, the metallic mask that covered my eyes and nose, and grey hair, I couldn’t blame them for looking at me like I was crazy. Kuk, it was painful. Why did I sign up for this!? I had to hurry to New Moon Agency. It was where people registered as ability users and received ability user-related jobs.

“Yeon Hwawoo-nim, you’re here to register as an ability user? With the mask?”

“Yes, just like this.”

“Follow me. You’ll have to show us your ability.”

The employee led me to a room with all sorts of random things. I saw a large boulder, thousands of bean-like things scattered on the ground, and weapons like swords and spears.

“If you need a tool to use your ability, do tell us.”

“No, it’s fine.”

I asked Peika to infuse herself into my glove.

When lightning began to flicker from my hand wearing the scale glove, the employee became startled and jumped back.

“I-Is it lightning? Nature-type abilities are rare...”

“Huu... Hap!”

Since there was a good target in front of me, I shot my fist flickering with sparks toward the large boulder. Although I wasn’t using Heroic Strike, I had grown familiar with focusing my

strength into one point. I could thus maximize my fist's destructive power. As expected, the boulder turned to dust and collapsed.

“This... I'll have to measure the value in detail, but it seems to be at least B+. To get such a high rating on your first assessment, amazing!”

“Haha, thank you.”

No, not B+! Father will make fun of me. Please, give me an A! Damn, if I knew this would happen, I would have used a spear!

Even though I happily replied to the employee, I was feeling grim on the inside as I walked out of the assessment room. The employee who had left for a while then came back with the data extrapolating my mana and strength.

“The results are out. Just looking at mana, Yeon Hwawoo-nim would be at B+ rank. However, taking into account the ability's uniqueness, suitability to the user's body, and control, it comes out to A rank. A-rank ability users are only about 12 percent of ability users worldwide. Yeon Hwawoo-nim is beginning from that starting line. The New Moon Agency is happy to have come across someone with such a strong potential. If you'd like to join the Guardian, under the government's direct supervision, then—”

“No, that's fine. I'd like to get my license now.”

“Yes, follow me. After taking a picture, you just need to pay for the license application fee.”

Carrying the license with my masked face on it, I left the New Moon Agency. When I looked at the time, it was nearing 1 P.M. In about an hour, I would enter the Event Dungeon... I felt my body tensing up from nervousness, but I somewhat enjoyed it. The dungeon was nice, but martial artists really shone when they trained themselves in a pit of danger!

At around 1:50, I was sitting in a café near the shopping mall, sipping on an ice coffee. With the Lizard Knight set I put on along with Otus' Secret, the gazes I was receiving were no joke.

“Who is that?”

“An ability user, right?”

“Why is there a fully armed ability user sitting here drinking coffee?”

“Ah, it's that thing. The Gate.”

The entrances to the Event Dungeons were officially called Gates. Feeling goosebumps at people's deductive ability, I silently drank my coffee.

Sitting across from me was my father, happily sipping on a caramel macchiato, wearing thick leather armor and with a thick

silver spear sitting by his side. Every time his Adam's Apple moved, his muscles bulged in an unsightly manner.

“Mm? What's wrong, Yeon Hwawoo!?”

“It's nothing.”

Why were the two of us the first two arrive? Because we couldn't act like father and son, the current situation felt incredibly awkward. I just wanted to quickly go into the dungeon. Why was this happening? Let me enter the Event Dungeon! I'll go in alone if I have to! I just want to fight!

“Hm, so... I mean, young man, why did you make such a dangerous decision?”

Father could have texted me at any time, but it seemed he wanted to ask me face-to-face.

“My master and father told me that martial artists grew by fighting with their lives on the line.”

“Ho, what a splendid father you have. I'd love to meet him.”

Father praised himself shamelessly, and retorted with a but.

“But when a real situation of life or death arrives, it isn't easy to move words into action. I'm curious how you so easily made your

mind to go to the dungeon.”

“You’re saying I accepted Mastiford’s request without thinking much about it.”

“Exactly.”

Father’s eyes seemed a little deeper. Ah, they were the same eyes he had when he began to lead my 10 year old self onto the path of a dungeon explorer. In other words, I couldn’t trust him right now.

“I knew the Event Dungeon’s difficulty and had trustworthy comrades to help me. Furthermore, Yeongdeungpo is close to where I live, so not only would it have been unwise to back out in this situation, it also would have not been honorable as a martial artist.”

“Rather than make-say, I want to hear the real reason.”

He found me out in an instant. With a shrug, I replied.

“Even now, all ability users are fighting against monsters with their lives at risk. Although their goals are likely money, they are undoubtedly getting stronger in blood battles. I’m different. I’m getting stronger leisurely in the dungeon where my limbs would grow back when they are cut, where I would not die even if I were killed. If I kept advancing in the same way, although I would become stronger, I felt that I would lack the ferocity required of a warrior.”

“Hm...”

“The fact that others were advancing without me was unbearable. I also need ferocity. Otherwise, when the time comes where I need to put my life on the line, I might become a coward who would try to run to safety. I don’t mean to throw my life away, but I don’t want to miss a chance to get stronger just because it’s dangerous.”

“... Is that it?”

“Yes, of course.”

That was the truth. The dungeon was certainly exciting and thrilling. It was full of danger, and it hurt incredibly when enemies stabbed me with a knife. The pleasure I felt from breathing a living monster’s breath, exchanging blows with our lives on the line, and finally plunging my spear into its heart was real.

At the same time, it was fake. I knew I would not lose my life even if I died in the dungeon. I acted knowing that I would always have another chance. Of course, if monsters did not start appearing on Earth, this would have been fine.

But that wasn’t the case now. The moon had become two, and the world became a place where it wouldn’t be weird for a monster to pop out at any time. Event Dungeons had appeared as well. Let’s say a situation arrived where I had to face monsters on Earth. If I fought with the same mindset as the one I had in the dungeon, if I



fought without knowing the ferocity of my life being at risk, a knife would pierce my heart in a moment of carelessness and that would be it.

Could there be anything more foolish? I did not want to become such a pathetic warrior. I did not want to become a warrior from a game where losing my life was an acceptable outcome. Although it could become a way of getting stronger, I could not let it become a mindset for battle.

Life was not in easy mode where I could try again and again. It was always in hell mode.

“Only in this way do I think I can truly become strong. Become... the strongest. Fath... Kang Yungoong-nim.”

It was [father's name](#), which was rather embarrassing to say.

Yungoong means ‘hero’

“Haha, I like your honesty! Too bad, I’ll be the one to hold the title of strongest!”

“Haha, you kid. That will be me.”

“Haha, I’m not kidding. It’ll be me!”

“MMM!”

“MMMM!”

We began to glare at each other. At the same time father grabbed his spear, lightning began to flicker from my hand. When a fight was about to break out to determine who was superior, we were interrupted.

“Wow, you guys get along pretty well.”

## Chapter 41. Event Dungeon (4)

---

“Wow, you guys get along pretty well.”

“H-Hello.”

When I stopped glaring at father and looked up, Ye Hwaya, or rather Hwaya Eleni Mastiford, was there. She was even more beautiful than on TV.

Her fiery red eyes and flame red hair stole people's attention and refused to let go. Plus, she had a provocative hourglass figure that accentuated her curves! For the sake of Yua, I almost wanted to ask what she ate to grow so well.

Most importantly, the red dress she was wearing left a strong impression. I opened my mouth staring at her dress fixedly.

“Nice to meet you, Mastiford-ssi. Are you sure you should wear a fluttery dress like that for battle?”

“Hmph, what do you know? This is a battle dress I personally commissioned the 45th Floor Shop to make with material dropped from a named monster. It raises my magic by 50 points! Though, it decreases my strength, dexterity, and constitution by 10...”

I was thinking her Korean was excellent when I realized her words didn't match her mouth's movement. I suspected that the dungeon translated our words when we were talking in the

communication channel. It seemed I was right.

“Mastiford-ssi, what language am I using right now?”

“Of course it’s Engli... Eh?”

She seemed to have noticed too. We were both talking and listening in our mother language. I thought this translation service only worked in the communication channel, but it looked like all conversation between dungeon explorers was translated automatically.

Thinking back, this was probably why I could talk to explorers from other continents with no problem. Without thinking more about it, I put the thought away and smiled.

“As you know, I’m Yeon Hwawoo. Nice to meet you, Mastiford-ssi.”

“Hmph, I’m not really interested in getting along with someone suspiciously covering his face, but I’ll accept your handshake for now.”

Mastiford reached out and met my hand with a sour look. For someone who was called the Flame Witch, her hands were incredibly cold. I then looked at Minami standing behind her.

I had heard she was mixed before. She had a black ponytail with grey streaks, and had emerald eyes. Although it wasn’t as

pronounced as Mastiford, she was still a beautiful young lady. Moreover, although she was slightly shorter than Yua, she was more grown in other areas. Ah, just what do I do about Yua!?

With a complicated heart, I reached my hand out toward her as well.

“Nice to meet you, Minami-ssi. I’m Yeon Hwawoo.”

“N-Nice to meet you. Uuu. Sorry, b-but I’m not really good with men...”

“Ah, sorry.”

I doubted whether she couldn’t even do a handshake, but I still retracted my hand. Immediately afterwards, father got up from his seat and spoke in a deep voice.

“I’m Kang Yungoong. Nice to meet you.”

“Mm, nice to meet you, Ajusshi. You aged well.”

“Hahaha, you are quite beautiful yourself, young lady! Your mother must be a beauty as well!”

This was the first time I was hearing father’s societal tone of voice. Scratching the goosebumps I was getting, I asked Mastiford.

“By the way, is the mana surrounding us an isolation magic? No one is looking this way.”

As much as Mastiford herself did not want to admit it, she was Korea's only SS-rank ability user. If she appeared at a café at a metropolitan area, the surrounding people should have gone wild, as if they just saw a top-class celebrity. However, it was too quiet. It was so quiet that it was impossible not to notice.

Mastiford smiled contently and nodded her head.

“Yep. I used an anti-recognition magic to prevent people from noticing us and a magic to erase our traces. I was originally a magic practitioner from Britain.”

“Before you even became a dungeon explorer?”

“Correct! I was chosen as Second Dungeon's dungeon explorer thanks to my outstanding talent in magic.”

I was surprised. The first surprise was the fact that magic existed even before Two Moon incident occurred. The second was that she was directly chosen as an explorer of the Second Dungeon. Finally, it was that ‘correct’ wasn't translated to its Korean equivalent. This dungeon translator was even better than I thought!

In any case, it seemed Mastiford was extremely proud of the ‘Second Dungeon’ title. I told myself to never tell her which dungeon I came from before my level surpassed hers.

“I-I... from a shrine, my father was a priest...”

This time, Minami started introducing herself. Ah, a Japanese shrine. I’d visited one with father before during our training. When we drew our fortunes, father got Great Curse and I got Great Blessing. He then proceeded to snatch my fortune, and a deathmatch ensued between us. For the record, I managed to defend it, and it was still enshrined in my room.

In any case, if Minami’s father was a priest, then she was...!

“A shrine maiden!”

“A part-time shrine maiden. I suddenly felt mana one day as I was working part-time.”

“...”

Well, I heard there weren’t real shrine maidens nowadays... but how is that fair? Are Japanese shrines overflowing with so much mana that a part-time worker would feel it!? Oh, how much I suffered to gain mana!

“Father used to be a Second Dungeon explorer, and he let me become a dungeon explorer after knowing I obtained mana. He passed away soon after that...”

I see. So until two years ago, her father was the fifth dungeon explorer, but he passed away after making his daughter a dungeon explorer. I finally understood. Father, Mastiford, and I became quiet after hearing that her father had passed, but Mastiford soon shouted cheerfully.

“Alright, let’s hurry into the dungeon before my magic runs out!”

“I agree. Let’s go.”

We left the café and headed to the Gate. On the way, Minami’s clothes caught my eyes. Its light, semi-transparent fabric revealed a hint of her skin.

“Minami-ssi, didn’t you say you were a tank? Are you okay with clothes like that?”

“Ah, thanks for worrying about me, Yeon Hwawoo-ssi. But this is a drop from a named monster, so it’s strong and sturdy.”

“Oh, I see...”

I’m wearing a Floor Master set. I’m not jealous in the slightest! I walked forward embarrassed, and saw father laughing. Like I said, I’m not jealous!

In a bit, we arrived in front of the Gate, a whirlpool of grey clouds. On top of it, the letter ‘A’ could clearly be seen. Mastiford first glanced at the ability users guarding it and confirmed that



they would not notice us.

“Alright, let’s go in.”

“Wait, Mastiford-ssi.”

“What?”

“We didn’t form a party yet.”

“Ah!”

It was extremely simple to form a party. After expressing the will to form a party, you just had to shake your hands with the people you wanted to invite to your party. After the four of us formed a party, she nodded and put her hand on Gate. At the same time, we all heard a message.

[Would you like to enter the A-rank Event Dungeon, ‘Spider Den’?]

“... I suddenly don’t want to enter anymore.”

Mastiford’s face suddenly lost color. As I knew the reason, I urged her on.

“Let’s hurry.”

“W-Wait. I-I hate spiders!”

“It’s too late for that!”

I lightly pushed her in.

“Uwaak!” Like in a manhwa, she screamed as she fell into the Gate. Because the party leader had gone in, we were sucked into the dungeon too.

‘I feel like I’m riding a rollercoaster.’ With that, I lost my consciousness.

“Yeon Hwawooooooooo!”

That was the first thing I heard when I woke up. I looked around. I was in a completely dark forest, dense with trees I had never seen before. The sky was no longer blue, but jet-black. At the same time, two moons, one yellow and one red, were lighting up the world.

We were all together, though Mastiford was glaring at me with a demon-like face. I retorted lightly.

“I know what my name is, even without you yelling it.”

“You pushed me! My heart wasn’t ready for it!”

“Mastiford-ssi, think about it. Who was the one that made us come here?”

“Me.”

“Who’s the party leader that has to go in first?”

“... Me. BUT!”

“Who’s the one that has to understand our situation and make plans?”

“... Me. Hiing, Sumireeee!”

“Yes, unni. Don’t cry. There, there.”

It was nice seeing two beauties hugging each other, but I wondered if Mastiford understood what I said. Excited by the new environment, father was looking around fiddling with his spear. He was better than the two of them by a wide margin.

“If you’re done crying, let’s go.”

“You, I’m going to burn away all your hair one day.”

“Just tell me when so I can get it insured.”

“As if I would!”

Strange. Why did jokes come out so smoothly when I was with Mastiford?

“I can feel something all around us.”

“It’s certainly different from the dungeon.”

“Event Dungeons usually have various environments. However, there is always only one clear condition.”

“Killing the boss.”

“Yep.”

Mastiford answered as she lit up a ball of flame on her hand. Immediately afterwards, something flew toward us from every direction.

[Spider webs! Master, burn them!]

Following Peika’s advice, I let her infuse herself in my gauntlet so she could shoot out lightning as she pleased. Her lightning then collided with the webs flying toward us, burning them to crisp.

Minami, who was watching from behind, flinched and took a step back.

“I’ll go to the front!”

Father seemed to have discovered the enemy’s position as he charged at a direction with his spear. I had also mostly figured out the number of spiders flying toward us and their positions.

“Those are some huge spiders. They’re almost as big as Mastiford.”

“Don’t say that!”

Mastiford screamed as she shot out fire everywhere. It was perfect, except her overly strong flames burned up the trees along with the spiders crawling down from them. Not even ashes were left of the spiders. I felt slightly regretful that the expensive monster remains were disappearing into the skies.

“Mastiford-ssi, can you freely extinguish your fire?”

“Yeah, I can just withdraw my mana.”

“Then let’s burn up all the trees as we go. That way, we won’t need to worry about ambushes from above. Haat!”

As I talked, I stabbed my gauntlet into the head of a spider that

used its string like a rope to fly from a tree across me. Pzzt. With a crackling sound, the lightning and the spider's head exploded.

Its disgusting bodily fluid splashed out in all direction. It did not drop a Bluestone either. It was not until later that I'd learn that Bluestones, blue nuggets that were found in monsters, were rather rare. That is, they didn't drop from just any random monsters. I dissected the pigeon from long ago, but it didn't have one either.

As I was thinking that, the two girls who saw the spider exploding in front of their eyes screamed.

“Kyaaak!”

“Kyaaak!”

“My ears!”

“I-I hate spiders!”

Mastiford stretched her arms out and sent dozens of balls of flames flying. Any spiders and trees that were hit by them were burnt up in an instant. There was truly no environmental destruction like it. Even an arsonist would bow down to her skills. Father, who was watching after killing a spider with his shockwave spear attack, gasped.

“So strong. Khm, if only I awakened to an ability like that!”

“Just do your job.”

Mastiford was truly powerful. She was proving the worth of an SS-rank ability user. No matter where a spider came from, when she stretched her arms out and sent her flames out, that would be the end. There wasn't much for the rest of us to do. The few times that we had to take action was when spiders that were lying hidden underground suddenly popped up.

The spiders had tough carapace that were hard to penetrate with pure strength. However, I had my fists strengthened with Spirit Aura and mana, and father had his shockwave-infused spear techniques. We both had no problem killing the spiders in one blow. Although I was ready for a certain amount of risk, it seemed I didn't need to worry too much.

For the record, we did not find even a single Bluestone. It was because Mastiford burned the majority of spiders we came across to a crisp. Since we were here to clear the Event Dungeon and not to farm money, I stayed quiet.

I was rather down from seeing Mastiford's ability, but it seemed Minami thought differently. Seeing father and me killing the spiders so easily, she spoke in awe.

“You two are really strong. I heard monster spiders were at least B-ranked and had hard carapaces that many abilities could only scratch.”

“Hahaha, don’t underestimate this Kang Yungoong!”

“I understand, so keep looking forward.”

Exploring a dungeon with father was more embarrassing than I imagined. Swinging my fist out and throwing spiders by their legs, I did my job silently until one hour later, when I sensed something and stopped everyone.



## Chapter 42. Event Dungeon (5)

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About an hour after we entered the dungeon, I made everyone stop. I sensed something strong, and there was more than one of it.

“I feel something. It might be the boss.”

“Mm... Ah, there really is. One, two... there’s three.”

“Wait, let me use detection magic.... Kyaaak!?”

Because I forgot to say they were hidden underground, I ended up hearing a soprano scream. Just like father said, three spiders suddenly appeared from underground, and I quickly pulled the party back. Each spider was about 3 meters tall. Spiders this big, where did I see them before? Ah, that’s right, Harry Potter!

“Kyaaaaak!”

Mastiford seemed to have received huge shock from the spider’s visual as she kept on screaming. As if it had been annoyed by all the screaming, one of the giant spiders shot a stream of white spider web like a bullet, aimed at Mastiford. Minami then stepped forward and help her shield up.

“Haaaap!”

Boom! The sound of a cannon shell colliding with metal rang out.

Such destructive power for a mere spider web! I looked back, worried about Minami's status. Thankfully, although she looked a little pale, she was fine. It seemed she didn't say she was good at defense for nothing.

"I-I'm fine, so take care of the spiders!"

"Got it!"

I clenched my fists and charged at one of the giant spiders in front of me. Father was also shooting out shockwaves at the other giant spiders, handling two at the same time. As I could not do long-range attacks with Spirit Aura yet, I could only fight one spider at a time.

"Eat this!"

I kicked the ground and approached a giant spider. Before it could tilt its body and dodge, I plunged my lightning clad gauntlet in the hole where it had shot spider webs earlier. When I let the lightning flow, the giant spider trembled and shrieked.

"Kyaaaaa!"

"Eat another one!"

Left hand this time! Right hand again! When I consecutively punched with my fists, it tried to use its two front legs to strike down at me. Although they were fast, I could easily dodge them as

I had seen the legs' initial movement. The two legs only hit empty air and dug into the ground with an explosive sound.

Immediately afterwards, I threw a right cross at one of its front legs. Clang! A sound like I had hit a metallic pillar rang out. I had to clench my teeth to endure the recoil, but I obtained the result I wanted.

“Kiyaaa!”

“An opening!”

When it screamed and raised its body half way up, I instantly ducked and jumped under it. I then pushed it with my lightning clad fists, making it fall on its back.

“Wow, amazing!”

Leaving behind Minami's awestruck shout, I leaped up and landed on its belly. Although it struggled and tried to attack me with its legs, it was in vain. I held its carapace on one hand and rained my other hand down like a hammer.

“Die! You! Spider! Bastard! Stop! Shooting! Out! Webs!”

Every time I struck down with my fist strengthened with mana and lightning, the spider twitched. It let out a bloodcurdling scream and struggled every time it was hit, but his reaction lessened as time went on.

Eventually, my fist succeeded in penetrating its belly. With my hand inside it, I let as much lightning flow out as possible.

Pzzzzzt!

“Ki—!”

The giant spider let out a short scream, then became calm as it dropped its eight legs on the ground. After confirming that it was dead, I dropped back down. It was then that I heard a message in my ear.

[You mastered Mid-rank Martial Arts! Attacks that make use of your body will be quicker and stronger. It can intimidate enemies possessing lower proficiency skills.]

That was considered martial arts? I was just punching it! When I was about to rebuke the message in my mind, more shocking messages flowed in.

[You satisfied the condition and learned High-rank Martial Arts skill. Your body becomes even tougher. It becomes easier to use highly complex skills, and your attacks will be effective against enemies stronger than you.]

[You satisfied the condition and learned 'Thunder Beast' skill. Thunder Beast is a combat-type special active skill that comes from possessing high-rank martial arts and a lightning ability.]

[Thunder Beast is a dangerous technique that attacks the enemy by exploding the user's superb physical ability and the power of lightning. This technique puts a burden on its user's body, so using it without high constitution may hurt the user instead. With its huge magic consumption, your magic stat must be high as well. It uses 1 percent of total mana per 1 second it is active. Using it for a long period of time may have negative effects on the user's constitution. It uses 1 percent of HP and MP per second when used inside the dungeon.]

My eyes became wide. Obtaining high-rank martial arts was somewhat expected, but the Thunder Beast skill was something I would never have imagined. It was like a surprise present. I knew what skills like it were called.

Compound skill. It was when two or more skills combined to create a stronger skill, or when achieving a certain level created a new skill by combining two or more skills. In my case, Thunder Beast was the result of my high-rank martial arts skill and lightning ability, or more specifically, lightning elemental Peika's Spirit Aura, combining. Although I had heard of it before, I never thought it would happen to me. I remembered Ellos complaining about wanting to get a compound skill...

The skill itself had an immense drawback befitting of its strong-sounding name. Using 1 percent of my mana every 1 second meant that I could only use it for 100 seconds at most. Not to mention, it said it also put a burden on my body. I could easily see how much burden it would be by looking at its HP consumption in the dungeon. Although it would undoubtedly be strong, I could feel how dangerous it was.

There was a reason for the difference in consumption inside and outside of the dungeon.

Outside of the dungeon, it was impossible to check one's HP and MP. Both HP and MP were values that only applied in the dungeon. They were safety mechanisms there to prevent dungeon explorers from dying. When the HP hit 0, the explorer would be kicked out of the dungeon. Likewise, MP was the safety mechanism on the explorer's mana.

No one explained this difference to me. As I explored the dungeon, I naturally learned the difference on my own.

In truth, there was not a big difference in my ability inside or outside the dungeon. It was just that I could not check my HP and MP outside the dungeon. That was just how it was.

Although Thunder Beast seemed to be a dangerous skill, the fact that I could use a powerful skill without my spear made me happy. I thanked my good fortune. With this, I really did not need to use a spear outside the dungeon.

When I finished going over all the messages I received, Mastiford had finally snapped out of it.

When I was about to say something to her, father's shockwave glazed a spider and hit the ground. It was then that I realized father was dealing with two spiders at once. Uwak, he's going to scold me later!

"Yeon Hwawoo, Miss, I need help!"

"I'm coming!"

"A-Ah! Sorry, Ajusshi!"

Even Mastiford's flames could not instantly burn up the giant spider. Plus, the two remaining spiders teamed up, as one attacked with its legs and the other attacked from the back by shooting out its webs.

In the end, Minami stood forward and blocked the spider's web bullets as father and I dealt with the spider fighting with its legs. Mastiford then managed to burn them up with yellow flames she created with few seconds of concentrating her energy. I thought it was a decent teamplay.

"Since we burned them up, we won't know if they had Bluestones."

"I-I don't want to look through spider corpses! That one too!"

“Mastiford-ssi, that one’s mine. Don’t burn it up.”

I leisurely picked apart the giant spider’s corpse, and found a fist-size Bluestone near its head. As it was the first Bluestone I found, I was especially attached to it. ‘So this Is the reason why so many ability users gritted their teeth to fight monsters?’

“Wow, it’s huge! With that size, it should easily go for 40 million.”

“40 million won? This thing?”

That was equivalent to about 20,000 gold. The giant spider was certainly strong, but that was still the amount I got from two Floor Masters. I was suddenly disillusioned by the job called dungeon explorer. But Minami still had more to say.

“No, it’s 40 million yen.”

“What!?”

Wait, then taking 100 yen as 900 won, that’s... 360 million won!?

“Why are you so surprised? It’s an elite monster even amongst A-rank monsters. Not only are their numbers small, Bluestones don’t always drop. Since we’re fighting with our life on the line, it’s only appropriate. In fact, isn’t it too small?”



“You should take this spider corpse too. I’ve never seen a spider this big, and its carapace is only broken around its belly. It should go for as much as the Bluestone.”

“7, 720 million won...”

‘... Maybe I should work as an ability user on the side.’ Realizing just how much money ability users made, I fiddled around with the Bluestone in my hand. However, as father was also eyeing the Bluestone with sparkling eyes, I left the detailed scrutiny to a later time. For now, I stored the Bluestone into my inventory along with the spider’s corpse.

“Is this mine? Or do we have to split it somehow?”

“Since Yeon Hwawoo-ssi killed it alone, it’s yours. We didn’t help you in any way.”

“... Mm.”

It still felt weird to take it all by myself. I could focus on the one because father was handling the other two, and the two girls then helped take care of the other two.

“I can give 10 percent to each. As a chippu.”

“Yeon Hwawoo-ssi, that’s Japanese.”

“Mm... as a tip then.”

How picky from a Japanese. Tip was in English and Mastiford didn't say anything!

“By the way, that wasn't the boss just now, right?”

“No. The Event Dungeons collapse when the boss dies. Uuu, with elite monsters like them, the boss monster would be... uuuu.”

Mastiford murmuring to herself with a frown was rather cute. But I just ignored it and walked forward. Of course, father's eyes were still fixed on me. I won't give it to you no matter how much you glare at me, father! Be happy with the 10 percent!

## Chapter 43. Event Dungeon (6)

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As we walked further forward, the forest became more and more like a vast plain. How could a forest become a plain?

It was simple. You just had to put a bunch of spiders in the forest along with Mastiford. With that, you'll be able to see the forest become a plain with your very eyes. More precisely, the forest would become a field of ash.

“Mastiford-ssi, are you fine on mana?”

“Yea, light flames like these don't use up much mana. Impressive, right?”

“Yeah, it's impressive.”

“H-Hmph! Even if you honestly praise my ability now, I have no intention of letting you enter my organization!”

“No, I'm telling you, I don't want to.”

“Why!?”

“I wonder why.” I mumbled.

Why were all girls around me so strange? There was Yua, who was strange as her cuteness went beyond the realm of humans,

Palludia, who after seeing me only once 4 years ago, shamelessly asked me to climb to the 25th floor in just three months, Su Ye-Eun, who had a bigger monsterphobia than ordinary people even with her cheaty stealth ability, and Mastiford, who I couldn't tell if she wanted to fight me or draw me into her organization... and Loretta too.

Loretta was too complicated a person, no, elf, to describe in just one sentence.

“Mm?”

Mastiford who was excitedly setting the forest ablaze suddenly frowned.

“It won't burn.”

“Where? Oh.”

It was true. In contrast to the barren surroundings, there was one area of black trees where her flames could not invade. She tried once again using her sun-yellow flame, but it was only enough to burn a few branches of the trees. The black trees were clearly special.

Suddenly, black smoke began to rise amongst the trees. It was as if the trees were calling us.

“Mastiford-ssi, we should go in. It doesn't look like we can burn

them.”

“B-But! What if a spider falls from above!?”

“Then just burn the spider to your heart’s content.”

“Eek! You think I won’t!?”

She became angry at my words and produced a white flame this time. I was curious what rank her different colored flames were classified as, but I decided to just watch for now.

The white flame she shot out flew like an arrow and seemed to envelope the entire forest, but before we noticed, it suddenly disappeared. It was almost like...

“I don’t think your flames are the problem. Doesn’t it look like the trees are absorbing the mana?”

“You’re right. The trees got bigger too.”

With that, Mastiford bit on her lips, drawing blood. She then used the blood to draw something on her palm.

“Tsk. I’m forced to use a skill. Hmph, I don’t like it. Go, Flame Beast!”

I doubted my eyes. Blue flames erupted from her palm and took the form of a tiger as big as the giant spider from before.

“If you had a skill like that, why didn’t you use it before?”

“I have to concentrate to use it, so I couldn’t use it staring at the spiders.”

“Don’t say that so proudly!”

The giant blue flame tiger wagged its tail once, then ran toward the black tree forest. Meanwhile, we dealt with the spiders appearing from the flat earth. As they did not appear from hard-to-see trees, but from an open field, we didn’t even break a sweat dealing with them.

When the tiger reached the forest, it swiped at the tree with its huge front paw. This time, there was a reaction! As the attack wasn’t purely made of mana, containing some of the tiger’s physical strength, the tree broke and fell. The tiger seemed excited as it set its fire ablaze and rampaged. Suddenly, however, something swooped down and pounced on the tiger.

“Ah, Cutie!”

“It has a name!?”

I wanted to ask just what part of that 4 meter tall tiger was cute, but now was not the time. A spider leg that suddenly popped out

from the black trees had pierced the tiger's body. The huge spider leg, which looked sharper than blades, then dealt a second and third blow without giving the tiger any chance to escape. In the end, the tiger disappeared into flames. Mastiford's eyes were set aflame.

“You dare kill my Cutie, I won't forgive you! I shall transform a piece of my soul into an undefeatable army! Army of Flames!”

Mastiford chanted in rage. Although I thought the chant was cringy, father thought it was cool. Soon, the temperature around us shot up, and flame incarnations like the tiger Cutie began to appear around us. Tiger, lion, bear, wolf, leopard, elephant, eagle, hawk, owl... the entire animal kingdom was here.

“Oh, it's the animal kingdom.”

To my dismay, father had thought the exact same thing. Mastiford quickly turned around and glared at father, then ordered the animal king... the Army of Flames.

“Burn up all the spiders in that forest!”

The animal army answered with their own cries and charged at the forest. Seeing the army, I understood why she was an SS-rank ability user. Who could possibly fight an army of intelligent flame incarnations? If they were my enemies, the result would be tragic.

Just like that, the rampage of the animal army began. Their goal,

to destroy the forest. If this was a movie, it would undoubtedly be a blockbuster. An army of animals destroying the environment and the flame witch commanding them.

But there was one animal who did not join in on the environmental destruction, but was instead wagging its tail on Mastiford's shoulder. The other animals were white or red, but this one was made of blue flames. Mastiford seemed to have noticed my gaze as she said, "Isn't my Cutie cute?"

"Is it the same one?"

"Yeah. It's smaller now because it was reverse-summoned once."

When it was big, it looked like a tiger. Now that it was small, it was more like a cat. Flame Witch and her pet flame cat. It was the perfect picture.

Kuk, for someone who looked like an evil witch commanding her demon soldiers, how could she look so lovely now...? I shook my head and looked away to prevent myself from being sucked in by her charming appearance. My body then stiffened.

Rather than shrinking, the black forest was expanding!

The barren ground became dyed in black. Seeds sprouted up and grew to black trees in an instant. The black earth continued to expand and approached where we were. Although the animal army roared and set the trees on fire, spider webs that endlessly shot out



from the trees restrained them as sharp spider legs cut them in half. Every time the army went down in number, the black forest's rate of expansion was increasing.

[Kiyaaaaa!]

A deafening shriek rang out from the forest. At the same time, a killing intent sharper than razor blades shot out toward us. There was no doubt. The owner of the forest had locked onto us.

“Mastiford-ssi, cancel your skill! They're only fertilizer for the forest at this point!”

“Unni, hurry!”

“Kuuuk... Sorry, guys! Big Bang!”

Our shouts and Mastiford's judgement were both swift. The moment she yelled Big Bang, an explosive boom rang out. It was undoubtedly a self-destruction skill. All the animals besides Cutie, who was standing on Mastiford's shoulder, had exploded!

The result was enough to instantly shrink the expanding forest. At the same time, a sharp shriek flew out.

[Kiyaaaaa!]

“Everyone prepare for battle! Minami-ssi, protect Mastiford-ssi!”

“G-Got it! Haap, Guardian!”

Minami shouted something and she began to shine with a golden light. I was curious as to what skill she used, but I decided not to look her way as the light was almost blinding.

Father and I stood on guard on the left and right side respectfully when suddenly something flew toward us.

[It’s poisonous! The spider web is poisonous!]

“It’s poisonous, be careful everyone!”

Thanking Peika for warning me, I punched at the spider web and burned it up with Peika’s lightning. Not one or two streams of spider webs, but hundreds flew toward us consecutively. Damn, if collected, there were enough to make several shirts!

Mastiford also created a few balls of flames in mid air, and was freely controlling them to burn up incoming spider webs. Father consecutively shot out light shockwaves and exploded spider webs mid flight. Watching it, I realized people’s abilities could be used in various ways. I thought to develop new ways to use my ability as an Elementalist.

By the time all the spider webs had been leisurely taken care of, someone’s voice flowed out.

[Ah, humans. I finally meet you.]

Because the voice was so sweet, I stopped moving for an instant. Where was this voice coming from? Who's was it? I was shaking just by hearing the voice.

[Come, come to my embrace.]

I raised my head. Everyone else did so as well. That's where the owner of the voice was.

From beyond the burnt up trees, the abdomen of a spider appeared. It was slightly bigger than the giant spider from before at about 5 meters, but on the place where the spider's thorax should be, there was something one would not expect to see on a spider.

[Spider Den's boss monster, Arachne, appeared! Defeating Arachne and clearing the dungeon will grant special rewards!]

[Come, hurry. I will give you everything you desire.]

“A girl...?” Father quietly whispered.

Yes, it was a human. An extremely beautiful one at that. She had flowing black hair and a pair of big eyes. The irises which carried a web shape left a deep impression.

It was a beauty that could not exist in reality. A mystical, illusionary beauty.

She had the power to grasp people's attention and not let go. Without wearing any clothes, her seductive figure was hard to describe with words...!

[Master, snap out of it!]

The moment Peika's shout rang out in my head, I bit down on my cheek. Although it bled, it roused me completely. Thinking that I was about to run into its embrace, I couldn't help but get goosebumps all over me. Not to mention, the temptation had not ended yet!

However, with my years of experience as an explorer, I knew what I had to do now. It was something that never let me down once!

“Ut!? Who'd fall for it!? A mere monster, you're a hundred years too early to try and seduce me!”

[You used Orc Lord's Warcry! All party members are cleansed of negative status effects. All party members' attack power increases by 50 percent for the duration. All party members become super-armored, unfazed by enemy attacks.]

In that instant, my somewhat hazy mind became clear. The girl on the spider's abdomen was certainly beautiful, but it was still a monster. How could anyone be mesmerized by a girl with a spider body and spider legs!?

“W-What!? I, just what happened?”

“M-Monster! It's a monster!”

“... Huk! W-Wife! I'm sorry!”

Father, we're going to need to have a deep conversation about this later!

## Chapter 44. Event Dungeon (7)

---

After questioning what thoughts father had in my mind, I urged everyone on.

“Attack! Now!”

“D-Did you do that, Yeon Hwawoo?”

“Less questions, more attacking!”

With that, I charged at Arachne. Warcry lasted for 5 minutes. If we couldn't defeat Arachne in 5 minutes, her charm would likely wipe us out.

“I-I don't have mana right now! I used it all up exploding the army!”

“Are you really SS-ranked!?”

“Hey, we wouldn't be doing so well without me! I'm recovering, so wait!”

It was true that she played a big role. Arachne's most feared weapon, the Black Forest, was restricted for now. The huge explosion from just now seemed to have reached Arachne too, as one of her legs were missing and green goo was coming out of what should be a hard carapace.

That said, Mastiford was a magician. Shouldn't she have learned how to manage her mana from the time she spent exploring the dungeon? For someone with such a powerful ability, she wasted too much energy in using her skills. In a way, her ability was something that went beyond her league.

For the record, Arachne's bodily fluid sizzled upon contact with the air and rose up as smoke. It was poisonous as well!

[Kiaaaaaak!]

What sounded like the singing of a beautiful voice was now nothing more than a monster's roar. At the same time, two of Arachne's legs flew toward us. I instinctively knew that if I was hit, I'd die! The goosebumps I instantly received urged me on. Using Divine Speed, I charged past its attacking legs and sent a punch toward its upper body.

[Kiaaak!]

"Letting a grappler approach, it's over! Thunder Beast!"

Since I used 20 percent of my mana with Divine Speed, I could only maintain Thunder Beast for 80 seconds. The moment I activated Thunder Beast, the lightning that was staying in my gauntlet expanded to cover my entire body. I could feel it strengthening my muscles and nerves. I could tell that this powerful ability had at least doubled my overall power.

From the outside, I looked like I was simply shining, as if I was shooting out lightning from my body. So that's why it's called Thunder Beast! To anyone looking at me, I probably looked more like a lightning beast than human.

[Master, something is forcefully taking my power!]

“Just hold on a little, Peika. I'll end it soon!”

[O-Okay, I'll do my best. Do Master's best too!]

With Peika's cute voice cheering me on, I struck my lightning clad fist on Arachne's face. Although it looked like a weak woman's face from the outside, there was not even a scratch, as expected of a boss.

In fact, Arachne screamed and tried to bite down on my fist. At the same time, she raised her two legs to attack me. Thankfully, father was there to stop it.

“You dare seduce me, when I have a wife!? I'll take your silk and make my wife and Yua a dress! Mega Wavelance!”

Father seemed to have used a major skill as Arachne screamed as her huge eyes trembled. Using this opening, I quickly wrapped my legs around her waist. Although she was a monster, I had still come in close contact with a naked woman's body. As such, her sweet scent and soft skin distracted me. After seeing this, father



shouted, “You bastard! I’ll tell Yua about this!”

“Shut it, Kang Yungoong-nim!”

‘Can you not make it obvious that we’re father and son!?’ After shouting at father, I continuously punched Arachne’s fair face. Tactile feeling aside, she was still a monster! Her beautiful looks made me feel like I was doing something inhumane, but I chose to ignore it.

[Kiaaaaaaaa!]

“Don’t open your mouth, your spit’s getting on my fist!”

Puk! Puk! Puk! Puk!

After continually pummeling her face with all my strength, Arachne’s face finally tore up from the heightened impact from Thunder Beast, and poisonous blood began to shoot out.

However, the lightning enveloping my entire body did not let the poison reach me in the slightest. I continued to punch her to do as much damage as I could before the time ran out. At the same time, just in case I couldn’t finish her off in the time frame I had, I did not forget to prepare the highest-grade Health and Mana Potions I had.

[Kiaaaaaaaa!]

Arachne seemed frustrated that she was unable to do anything as she wildly shook her human arms to attack me. Although they looked like a frail girl's arms, the impact they had upon hitting my armor was indescribably painful. Although they weren't as strong as her spider legs, they were as strong as my own arms. Furthermore, as time went on and she realized the life-threatening situation she was in, she crazily shot out spider webs from her bottom half.

The streams of spider webs flying out in all directions then joined into a single large stream and attacked father and me. As we were both super-armored, receiving the attack didn't hinder our movements by much. That said, we would still be injured. At that moment...

"Uuu, if I collapse from anemia, it's you two's fault! Cutie, hold out a little longer!" Mastiford shouted.

As if to prove the saying that 'a diamond on a dunghill was still a diamond,' Mastiford made her final move. I felt something flying past my shoulders like an arrow. At the same time, the poisonous spider webs that were attacking me were burnt up and disappeared.

Not only that, a white ball of flame that was flying through the air struck Arachne's body, making her cry out in pain. In just this short moment, Mastiford had recovered enough mana to use another skill! Although she was regretful in some areas, her ability was undoubtedly shocking.

In truth, I almost fell for Mastiford who managed to play such a pivotal role even after using skill after skill. Thankfully, I held on with Warcry's effect. As I thought, love was a status effect! It wasn't normal! I converted all of my emotions into rage as I pummeled Arachne.

“Haaaaaa! Diediediediediedie!”

[Kiaaaaaaak!]

“Die! Wave Gatling!”

It was the moment where I found out from who exactly that I inherited my harsh tongue. Father and I both yelled out crudely as we beat up Arachne. She in turn screamed and thrashed about with her two human arms and five spider legs. In response, I used Dragon Skin. When Arachne hit my body, her eyes opened wide in pain.

[Kiik! Kiiik!]

“Yep, that's what I wanted to hear! A mere arthropod should not try to seduce a human! You're 5 million years too early for that! Die!”

I considered using Dark Thunder Explosion, but I saved it in case an Event Raid broke out afterwards. Plus, I felt it wasn't necessary now either.

Because of Dragon Skin, the speed brought up by Thunder Beast was halved. Even so, I was fast enough that Arachne could not dodge me. My fists hardened by Dragon Skin had more than enough destructive power to make up for the decrease in speed.

Eventually, the end arrived. My fists pummeling her face finally penetrated skin and broke her bones.

[Kiii!]

The headless Arachne let out a short shriek and went limp. I finally got up from my mounted position and deactivated Thunder Beast. The party members then eased their tension after knowing the boss fight had ended.

“Whew, haaa.... I’m exhausted.”

“Good job, so... Yeon Hwawoo!”

“Nice finish!”

“You looked cool!”

The moment the Thunder Beast’s effect went away, exhaustion swept over me. I felt like collapsing in place. The drained mana gave me a headache and the overexertion of my body made my muscles convulse. Dragon Skin was the only thing keeping me from falling on my knees.

When I tried to pull my hand out of Arachne's head, I felt something in the way. When I dug through its brain and looked, a Bluestone glowing deep-blue came out. Although it was small, its brilliance was incomparable to the giant spider's. I suddenly felt strength in my body again. With sparkling eyes, I showed everyone the Bluestone.

“Oh, this looks expensive! Everyone, look!”

“Hey, I know it's a monster, but you shouldn't dig through a beautiful woman's head like that...”

“Mastiford-ssi, you yourself called it a monster. Don't be so picky...”

“You were cool, Yeon Hwawoo-nim! Really cool! You were like the incarnation of [Takemikazuchi](#)!”

Japanese God of Thunder

Unlike Mastiford who gasped and backed away, Minami applauded me with sparkly eyes. I didn't know what Takemikazuchi was, but I let it be since it sounded like a compliment. I gave her a thumbs up and slid down Arachne's body. I then saw father rubbing his chin while staring at Arachne's leg that he had ripped off. When he saw me looking at him in anticipation, he knocked on the leg's carapace with his spear and said, “This. Don't you think it would taste great if you fry it? Like crabs.”

“It’s poisonous!”

He calmly said something I never would have imagined. Then, a fanfare suddenly rang out.

[You defeated the Event Dungeon boss monster, Arachne!]

[100,000 gold is distributed evenly amongst party members. You received 25,000 gold.]

[Kang Shin-nim’s contribution is the highest. Choose your reward.]

- [1. Arachne’s Silk Dress
2. Arachne’s Black Earthen Spear
3. Arachne’s Cobweb Earrings
4. Arachne’s Cobweb Bracelet]

Gasp! My contribution was the highest!? I definitely thought Mastiford would have the highest contribution. Now that I thought about it, although Mastiford showed great firepower throughout the dungeon, the only damage she did to Arachne was through the initial explosion and Cutie’s final attack.

She would have high contribution points, but it seemed it wasn’t higher than mine, as I dealt most of the damage against Arachne and even dealt the final blow.

As expected, Mastiford was complaining.

“What? Who has the highest contribution? Why isn’t it me?”

“It’s me, Mastiford-ssi.”

“Mmm, if it’s you, then... though I don’t want to admit it...”

Thankfully, it seemed other people couldn’t see the [Kang Shin-nim’s contribution...] message. I had forgotten about it, but my real name would have been found out.

After answering Mastiford, I slowly examined the reward list. Perhaps because it was an Event Dungeon, or because all four of us made good contributions, all four items seemed excellent.

That said, I knew the items higher up on the list were better than the ones below. Since the dress and earrings were likely for females only, I had to choose either the spear or the bracelet. I glanced at father. His weapon was the Silver Spear just like mine. I wondered if I should give father the spear under the ‘elder’s first’ spirit.

“Alright.”

I contemplated for about 0.01 seconds before I picked the Black Earthen Spear without hesitation. I then quickly stuffed it into my

inventory so father wouldn't see it. It was the perfect crime.



## Chapter 45. Event Dungeon (8)

---

‘Sorry, but I’ll be the first to get stronger, father. I’ll pay you back for letting me become a dungeon explorer later!’ I said in my heart. I knew that if I said it out loud, father would continue the fight we couldn’t finish before. I decided to call it even by forgetting about his shameful act when Arachne first appeared.

As I finished up the negotiation with father in my head and looked at the spear in my inventory with smiley eyes, Mastiford flinched slightly. It seems she got 2nd in contribution.

“Ah, I’m 2nd. Good, It would have been too shameful otherwise. Let’s see... ek.”

Mastiford clicked her tongue as if she didn’t like what she saw. Mm, I couldn’t fault her. There were really two items she could choose from. The Silk Dress was obviously the better one, but she already had an excellent battle dress. There was also no guarantee that the reward from the A-rank dungeon, Spider Den, would be better than the battle dress she made using 45th floor’s named monster drop.

She would obviously choose the earring, which meant Minami would end up with the dress. Even if her contribution was higher than father’s, she would not choose the bracelet over the dress. However, the dress wasn’t a suitable equipment for a tank like her.

Although father would gladly take the dress if that was what was left, Minami, who didn’t know how much father cared for mother,

would undoubtedly take the dress to be considerate of father. Mastiford likely knew all this, and thus could not easily pick the earring. She was thinking of Minami.

Minami mumbled to herself and asked Minami. It seemed she wanted Minami to make the decision.

“Sumire, between an earring, bracelet, and a dress, what do you want?”

“U-Unni can choose what you want. You don’t have to be considerate of me. My contribution is probably the lowest anyways.”

“How can I!? I could freely use skills because you were protecting me! I’ll get angry if you keep saying that.”

I expected as much, but she was too good a person! How could she act so compassionately toward girls!? I wondered if she was bipolar. No, maybe it was a scheme to draw Minami into her organization!

If so, she had a terrifying acting skill... Of course, I could only feel sincerity from Mastiford’s words. It was unlikely that it was false. Minami must have felt it too as she looked deeply touched.

“Unni...!”

“D-Don’t look at me like that. I only said what was on my mind.”

“Unni!”

Seeing the two girls embracing each other, I looked away. Stop showing off and pick your items, so we can check whether a raid boss appeared or not!

In the end, Mastiford chose the dress which would have no meaning in Minami’s hands. With this, Minami had the chance to get the earring. Mastiford looked quite content with the black web-patterned silk dress, as she was smiling.

It was father’s turn next, and he unexpectedly took his time.

“What are you thinking about!?”

I wondered if I needed to treat father like a pervert from now on. Of course, father quickly dispelled my worry.

“No, I was just thinking how beautiful my wife would look with the earrings.”

“You can stop with the devoted husband act... just buy her some other pretty earrings. Minami-ssi would prefer the earrings over the bracelet, too.”

“Ajusshi’s wife is quite fortunate. She has a husband who thinks of her before his own reward.”

“Kuhum, right... Yeon Hwawoo is right. Earrings would be better than a bracelet for a young lady.”

In the end, father took Minami into consideration and chose the bracelet. There was only one other reward left. Before Minami picked it, we gathered in one place as promised before.

“Make sure your health and mana is recovered. If a raid boss appears, I’ll tie him down with a huge skill, so use your strongest skills before it causes any casualties. Got it?”

“Couldn’t we have just warned the other ability users? If people end up getting hurt, it’s on you, Mastiford-ssi.”

“Raid bosses automatically focus on the party that cleared the Event Dungeon. Other people won’t get hurt unless they try to get in our way. Don’t look down on an SS-rank ability user!”

“Mm, well, okay.”

“Ugaaaah!”

I was kidding of course. Once Mastiford’s mana was completely recovered, I believed she could restrain the raid boss just like she said. Now that I had experienced clearing a dungeon with her, I fully understood where her confidence came from.

If only she was a bit more serious about her fights, she could become much stronger... Perhaps her clumsiness was a side-effect of obtaining such a strong ability so suddenly. I didn't need to worry. I believed she would realize it by herself one day. I just hoped it wouldn't be in a situation of life or death.

After we all had a good rest, Minami took the earrings and finished the reward distribution. Everyone tensed up and prepared for the raid boss to appear. However, a fanfare rang out once again.

[You completely cleared an A-rank Event Dungeon! All party members gain 1 bonus stat!]

[You will now return.]

“Eh? What about the raid boss?”

“There is none! When a raid boss appears, the clear reward is given out, then it pops out after the ground collapses. In any case, hurry up and gather! I'm going to cast anti-recognition magic!”

Leaving behind the sense of emptiness we felt, we quickly gathered around Mastiford. She mumbled something to herself then opened her hands. At the same time, a black whirlpool appeared below us, and I once again lost consciousness.

When I woke up, we were at the shopping mall where the Gate

was. When the Gate suddenly disappeared and revealed the shopping mall, the Guardians protecting the area became startled and started looking around. We did our best to hide any trace of us being there as we made our way out. Just like that, we took care of a source of trouble without having to face a raid boss.

Since I had to deal with the giant spider's corpse and Bluestone, Arachne's corpse and Bluestone were also left for me to take care of.

Ability users could create an ability user-specific account at the bank, meaning the account could be under an assumed name. Although there was a catch that the ability user needed some way to prove his identity to use the account, it was more than made up for by the fact that it could be used anywhere in the world.

I wrote down everyone's bank account to evenly distribute the gains from Arachne and to give each of them 10 percent of the gains from the giant spider. As we had partied together, there was at least that much trust between us.

After we had planned everything out, we were done with our day.

"Huu, thanks for listening to my request. Sumire, Yeon Hwawoo, Yungoong Ajusshi. With this, I'll forgive the two of you for refusing to enter my organization."

"You were still holding that against us?"

“Shush!”

I remembered her saying she was weak in close-combat, but her elbows certainly hurt. After silencing me, Mastiford offered father a handshake.

“I liked how you charged in without fear, Ajusshi. You were pretty strong.”

“Hahaha, you were cool too, young lady. I’d be happy to be in a team with you in the future.”

“You’re more honest now! If it’s Ajusshi, just contact me at any time. You’ll always be welcome!”

After fighting together, we were much less on guard against each other. Moreover, by fighting together, we confirmed that we were virtuous people. After shaking hands with father, Mastiford hugged Minami again.

“Sumire! Thanks for coming all the way from Japan for me. I love you!”

“Me too, unni!”

Although I only found out later, it seemed they had met each other before after talking in the communication channel. That was why Minami had flown over from Japan so wholeheartedly. Perhaps it was because they were both actively working as ability

users, but they were certainly quick to act.

“You can sleep over at my place today. Mom said she’d prepare something delicious.”

“Wow, thanks, unni!”

“Well, I’m off.”

Because the two of them looked like they’d continue for a while, I wanted to quickly get away. When I tried to leave after waving my hand, Mastiford hurriedly grabbed my wrist.

“Whoa!”

“Y-Yeon Hwawoo.”

“What?”

“Th... Thanks for coming. Although it wasn’t as much as me, y-you at least had the strength to back up your confidence.”

She was still embracing Minami, not showing me her face. However, I knew she was being sincere. Feeling my impression of her becoming better and better, I answered, “Yeah, it’s good that you know. I’m off then.”



“D-Do you... want to come too? To my place.”

“No, I’m fine. Who knows what’ll happen if I go?”

“My house is a normal home!”

I found it funny that an SS-rank ability user who could build a mansion out of gold was living in a normal home. Well, she did mention she was staying at her mom’s place. With a smile, I lightly shook her hand and let go.

“Then see you later. Same for you Minami-ssi. You really were tough. I’ll see you later.”

“Y-Yes. Take good care of me, Yeon Hwawoo-nim!”

“... Nim?”

“Yeon Hwawoo, I’ll see you later.”

“Yeah, Kang Yungoong Ajusshi.”

After exchanging a strange goodbye with Minami and an awkward goodbye with father, I turned around. Lizard Knight’s Scale Armor was making a pleasant clicking sound.

A lot had happened. It was a good opportunity to see other

dungeon explorers' strengths, and a good opportunity to explore a dungeon that had appeared on Earth.

I felt good. The bone-chilling danger I felt for an instant while fighting Arachne. The Divine Speed that I activated at the perfect moment without saying anything. Plus, the Thunder Beast I obtained.

Everything was satisfactory.

‘How fun. I might become addicted.’

If I were to give it a review, I would rate it all 5 stars. I felt an exhilarating surge of strength that went beyond what could be described with numbers, and came not from heightened tension, but from something more fundamental. I couldn't hide the smile coming out of my mouth.

The world was a beautiful place.

Dungeons! Monsters! I didn't know who set these dangerous things loose in this world. But I knew one thing for certain: They were making me stronger!

“I will become the strongest.”

The strongest that no one could dare to go against! Pledging to myself once more, I began to head toward the trade center. It was then that I received a call from Yua.

[Oppa, where are you? Did you register as an ability user yet?]

“Yua! Yeah, oppa hit a jackpot in his first hunt too!”

[Really? So cool! ... How much did you make?]

“Hundreds of millions! I’ll bring some fried chicken on my way back. If there’s anything else you want, just tell me.”

[Fried chicken! I love you, oppa!]

“Yeah yeah, oppa loves Yua too. Just wait a little longer!”

Ah, it was truly a perfect day. There was nothing better than eating chicken with one’s younger sister!

# Chapter 46. Hermes (1)

---

There was only 1 week left from the 3 month period Palludia made me promise.

And today, with the Muscle Strengthening Elixir I gained from the first Lizard Knight I hunted, I had reached my limit.

[Your muscles become strengthened to their limit, greatly increasing your explosive power. Your strength and dexterity both increase by 3. It seems there will be no further effect if you consume more of the same item.]

The moment the 10th increase appeared for Muscle Strengthening Elixir, I saw my strength and dexterity increase by 3 for a total of 12. Combined together, they were almost 5 levels worth of stats.

[Name: Kang Shin Race: Human Sex: Male  
Class: Elementalist (Sub – Skill Collector) Title: Lizard Knight  
Master Rank: Silver 9  
Level: 21  
HP – 7,650/7,650 MP – 5,460/5,460  
Strength – 70(+22) Dexterity – 63(+15) Constitution – 60(+15)  
Intelligence – 20(+5) Magic – 77(+5) Charm – 45(+5) Luck – 21(+5)]

Normal Skill – High-rank Martial Arts (Lv 1), High-rank Spear Technique (Lv 4), Peruta Circuit (Lv 4), Mid-rank Heroic Strike (Lv 3), Low-rank Provoke (Lv 9), Return (Lv 1), Deific Manifestation

Class Skill – Low-rank Spirit Mastery (Lv 9), Low-rank Spirit Aura (Lv 6), Low-rank Elemental Control (Lv 7), Low-rank Elemental Contract (Lv 7), Low-rank Elemental Tempest (Lv 8), Thunder Beast (Lv 1)

Subclass Skill – Endow Skill, Spirit of the Collector]

“Wow, 22 bonus stats just in strength.”

5 from the title’s effect, 2 from the Power Earring I obtained on the 5th floor, 10 from the Lizard Knight set effect.

The other 5 came from Black Earthen Spear, which had a cheaty effect of increasing my strength by 5 and dexterity by 10. As expected of a reward from an A-rank dungeon.

There was more. All attacks done with the spear applied poison damage, and poisoned the enemy with a fixed chance!

I didn’t regret picking the Black Earthen Spear at all. Although it had not been long since I got my Silver Spear, it was simply incomparable to the Black Earthen Spear, both in terms of stat bonuses and extra effects.

“Though I’d love to enter another Event Dungeon...”

After Korea's Gate suddenly disappeared, other countries went on high alert and increased the security on their Gates. Although many countries investigated why Korea's Gate disappeared, unless a dungeon explorer told them, they had no way of knowing. Mastiford had also gone on TV to warn the world about the danger of Gates.

With the excuse that she saw it in her dream when she awakened, she warned that a disaster might strike if they were cleared hastily. Her words had also increased security around the Gates.

As there was no guarantee that a raid boss would not appear, I couldn't just randomly clear an Event Dungeon. Even if I knew a raid boss wouldn't appear, there was no way for me to enter an Event Dungeon without being found out by other countries, not unless I had Mastiford's help, anyways. Knowing stat points and other delicious rewards waited, I could not do anything about it.

“So there's only one thing I can do.”

I looked at the scene in front of me and grabbed a handful of popcorn, which I took out from my inventory. Then, I shouted in a mumble, “Keep going Ren!”

“Crown Prince! I hate you!” Ren shouted as he frantically ‘parried’ the Lizard Knight's attack with his claymore. That was right. I was currently watching Ren's one-on-one fight against the Lizard Knight. It was a fight that really had you on the edge of your seat.

“Don’t give up! Put more strength into your legs!”

“Ugaaaaaah!”

Ren squeezed out all the strength he could muster as he swung his claymore. His form had been honed through 3 weeks of training. As he had an abnormally high strength from the beginning, if he learned enough techniques, there was a good chance he could defeat the Lizard Knight alone.

In truth, the ‘thrashing phase’ was supposed to last a full month. However, there was no need to break my promise with Palludia and stay for one more week.

“The tail’s coming!”

“Haap!”

The moment I yelled out, Ren instantly reacted and slid toward the Lizard Knight. The tail swung empty air, and having approached the Lizard Knight, Ren rushed into close quarters of the Lizard Knight whose form had been disrupted from swinging its tail. Then, he shouted as he raised his claymore.

“Lion Upper!”

“Kahak!”

“Good!”

I clapped. Not facing the enemy directly, but going for a fatal blow using the inevitable opening the enemy created. That was at the core of my teaching. Ren had just done exactly that.

Realizing I had succeeded in putting down his hot-blooded temper, I felt like crying tears of joy. With this, he could proudly say he had passed the thrashing phase.

“Shiiik! Human, die!”

“As if! Lion Strike!”

Even though I was eating popcorn as I cheered Ren on, I tensed up when the Lizard Knight raised its spear. If Ren failed, I had to jump in and pick up where he left off. It was why I was here in the first place.

However, it seemed I had worried for nothing. Ren used the perfect skill for the occasion, making the Lizard Knight let go of his spear. When he became flustered, Ren’s attack poured in.

“Lion Cross Attack!”

‘Ren really likes lions.’ Thinking absent-mindedly, I watched a cross-shaped wound appear on the Lizard Knight’s chest. It was



deep. He didn't consume elixirs by grinding Floor Masters like me, so why was he so strong? Even though I raised my strength with the Muscle Compressing Elixir and Muscle Strengthening Elixir, I felt like I would lose by a slight margin if I compared my strength with Ren directly.

As I tried to wrap my head around this mystery, Lizard Knight used Dragon Skin. At this point, Ren started using the tactic I had taught him.

That is, he picked up the Lizard Knight's spear faster than he could, and ran away.

"Give it back, Human!"

"I won't, Lizard Knightttt!"

Ren picked up my way of talking as well. I called it the IED ([Intermittent Explosive Disorder](#)) Reflection. It was because monsters who heard it would almost die from IED. I wondered if the dungeon would let that become a status effect. Today, Ren's and my Provoke skill proficiency was diligently increasing.

Behavioral disorder characterized by explosive outbursts of anger and violence, often to the point of rage, that are disproportionate to the situation at hand (e.g., impulsive screaming triggered by relatively inconsequential events)

"Give it to me now, Human!"

“Like I ever would!”

The Lizard Knight became slower in his Dragon Skin state. As such, he always used his earthquake attack to deal great damage. However, if you made him drop his spear, he would always try to pick up his spear first.

If you took his spear and ran away, the Lizard Knight would always chase after the one who took it. He could try to use his hands to attempt the earthquake attack, but he never did, no matter what. He always tried to get his spear back.

With the 50 percent decrease in speed from Dragon Skin, it was hard to catch up to someone focused on running away. Even so, he chased after Ren with his reddened skin. Against such a horrifying sight, the one running away would also be motivated to run faster. Since the runner would die the moment he was caught, he quite literally ran with his life on the line.

The result was a game of tag that made any spectators watching laugh hysterically.

“Ren, I can see your legs!”

“If you couldn’t see my legs, I’d be a ghost, not a human! Uhuk, he’s going to get me!”

“HUMAAAAAN!”

The Lizard Knight roared as he chased after Ren. Oh! Ren was getting faster! Humans truly showed greatest growth in the most desperate situations. I came to such conclusion as I shoved some more popcorn in my mouth.

“H-HUMAAAAN!”

“I’m not deaf, you lizard bastard!”

“Kushaaa!”

Ren and the Lizard Knight were making laps around the wide boss room. The Lizard Knight, who saw me in the middle of chasing Ren, came after me as if to finish me off first. When I grabbed him and sent him flying back, he coughed up blood, got back up while shaking his head, and continued chasing Ren. It seemed he instinctively understood that he was no match for me without his spear. When the Lizard Knight began chasing him again, Ren frowned and shouted.

“Unfair, Crown Prince! Why are you so relaxed!?”

“I’m not relaxed at all, Ren. In fact, I’m tensed. My hands are all sweaty from thinking about whether you’ll be caught or not. Nom.”

“Don’t say that as you eat popcorn!”

Their running competition ended in less than 5 minutes. Once

Dragon Skin had worn off, the Lizard Knight had caught up to Ren.

“I caught you, Human!”

“I’m the one who caught you!”

At that moment, Ren instantly turned around and threw the spear randomly at his face. The Lizard Knight instinctively grabbed the spear, then made a regretful expression.

“Lion Rage Rush!”

Immediately afterwards, Ren’s claymore radiating with a golden aura pierced its chest. It was a clean and powerful strike.

Although the Lizard Knight tried to strike down at Ren with his spear, his trembling arms no longer had any strength. In the end, he dropped his head without ever stabbing Ren. He was dead.

[You defeated the Floor Master!]

[10,000 gold is distributed evenly among party members. You received 5,000 gold.]

Holding his claymore, Ren stood still silently. I clapped as I put the popcorn away.

“Congratulations, Ren.”

“I... I...”

“That’s right. You defeated him alone.”

“Hu... Huhuhuhu. Thank you, thank you, Crown Prince! I never thought I would succeed in hunting the Lizard Knight alone!”

Ren raised his claymore into the air with a happy expression. I also smiled and responded.

“You did well. Well, you’ll have to do it again by yourself if you want to receive the special reward and title.”

Ren looked at me with a blank expression, then asked.

“I, I see... Then what was this?”

“The thrashing phase graduation test.”

After hearing my words, Ren became silent for a long time. His hands holding the claymore trembled as he opened his mouth.

“A-Are you saying... that I have to do another Floor Master solo raid?”

“Yep. You did it once, who’s to say you can’t do it again?”

“...”

Ren slowly turned to face me. His hands were holding his claymore.

“CROWN PRINCEEE!”

Smacking my lips, I cleaned the popcorn crumbs on my mouth. Getting up with my spear in hand, I mumbled regretfully.

“Tsk, it hasn’t been fully fixed yet.”

3 weeks. Although the time I spent with Ren was short, it was enough to form a close bond between us. Standing in front of the Floor Shop, I shook hands with Ren, who currently looked like a mess.

“I taught you everything I could. If you succeed in the Lizard Knight solo raid, you can go around calling yourself a warrior.”

“Thank you, Crown Prince. But it hurts where you hit me.”

“You reap what you sow. Alright, then. I wish you luck.”

“... Before you go, there’s something I want to confess.”

“Sorry, but I’m into women.”

“I like women too! That’s not the confession I’m talking about!”

Ren shouted angrily. I laughed at his predictable reaction.

“Then what confession are you talking about?”

“I’m... not human.”

Eh? That wasn’t what I expected at all. Not knowing how to respond, I just stiffened with my smiling face. Ren then put strength in his body with a humph.

In the next moment, two triangular tufts of fur appeared. No, rather than tufts, those were ears.

... Ears?

“I’m a beastman. You’ve probably heard of them before. A race that possesses the traits of both beast and human.”

“Ah, I’ve heard of werewolves before. Ones that turn into wolves under the full moon.”

“Full moon? I’m not sure what you mean, but I am the last surviving member of the lion beastman, called werelions. Although we can’t turn into lions, we do have strength that vastly surpasses that of humans. In exchange, our wild nature explodes out often...”

So that’s why he was so strong! The mystery had been solved completely. A race possessing traits of both human and beast. As I was thinking rather stupid things like how Panan continent also had lions, I noticed Ren’s lion ears twitch. With Ren’s handsome, but not at all cute, face, it created somewhat of a weird combination. Looking at it, I could feel something boiling inside of me.

“Ren, put away your ears.”

“Crown Prince, why are you holding up your spear? Why are you pointing it at me?”

I shouted at Ren who was asking such an obvious question.

“I don’t need animal ears from men!”

“Uwoaaah! C-Calm down! Uwaaak!”

Just like that, it would take a little longer until Ren could go do his solo raid.

“Thanks for everything. I’ll report to you once I succeed.”



“Goodbye, Ren. Try not to take your ears out.”

“Mm, I have no plans to show them to anyone other than Crown Prince. Then, I’m off.”

After confirming that we had each other on our friend lists, we disbanded the party. Ren returned to the dungeon he came from. Confirming that he had disappeared, I let out a deep sigh. Now that a comrade I spent some time with was gone, I felt a little empty. Unconsciously, I mumbled.

“I’m alone again.”

“What do you mean alone, Shin-nim? I’m disappointed.”

When I turned around, I saw Loretta with her elbows on her shop desk and her chin on her hand, staring at me with her oval eyes.

“I’ve always been by your side.”

“Ah, sorry, Loretta. You’re right. It’s us two again. I feel a bit happy since Loretta pointed it out.”

Because I felt like a connection other than that of shopkeeper and customer existed between us, I felt happy. Hearing my words, Loretta’s face reddened. Then, as if to hide her face, she put her hands over it.

“ ... ”

“Loretta? What’s wrong?”

“Shin-nim. You did that on purpose, right? You did it fully knowing everything, right?”

“Knowing what?”

“Aaaaaah! You’re really frustrating! Go away, don’t come back!”

“Even if I do, I’ll see you again on the 21st Floor Shop.”

“I don’t care! Just go for now! Ah before you go, here’s Holy Water! 1,500 gold per bottle!”

“You’re still selling!? Your business spirit is astonishing as always!”

A woman’s heart was indeed complicated. I didn’t know just which rhythm to beat to! I climbed to the 21st floor grumbling. In my hand were five bottles of Holy Water, which was 7,500 gold.

There was one week left. To appease the little crown princess’s anger, it was time for me, who wasn’t some knight nor hero, to run to the 25th floor!

## Chapter 47. Hermes (2)

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Zombies. They were creatures with the terrifying appearance of rotting skin, moving erratically without hints of human consciousness. They were said to be able to infect those that they bite or wound, turning them into zombies. It was why so many people watched zombie movies on the edge of their seats.

In these movies where everything was realistic except for the existence of zombies, the main characters awaited their doom. All humans on Earth turned into zombies, and the main characters, who were always among the last surviving humans, trembled in fear at this unprecedented terror.

But what if you added another element to this formula? For example, what if by having high constitution and a bit of mana, you could disinfect yourself of the zombies' poisons? Or even if you didn't have those things, you could just spray some Holy Water on your wound, and even melt the zombie by spraying it in Holy Water?

Of course, I did not believe zombies could break through my armor anyways. Even if they could, they would have hard time breaking through my skin that was strengthened by my high constitution.

In any case, what was left in that situation was the irritation caused by smell of rotting corpses and the concern about my eyes that were forced to see rather unsightly things.

“Kyaaaaak!”

“Tempest!”

Tempest used in conjunction with the Black Earthen Spear swept up dozens of zombies like they were paper airplanes. Most of these zombies died, and the ones that didn't soon collapsed from being poisoned. As I fought Floor Masters most of the time, I was like a wolf in a flock of sheep when fighting normal monsters.

“Tempest! Tempest!”

“Kyagyaaa!”

“Kuaaaa!”

When I used Tempest like consecutively shooting out bullets, the zombies around me exploded out in all directions like bowling pins. Blood from those that died from Black Earthen Spear's poison scattered on other zombies and infected them as well. I felt like I was playing some first person shooter. Of course, no matter how much mana I had, because Tempest used 300 MP every time I used it, I had to drink a lowest-grade Mana Potion every minute.

“Peika, take care of that side.”

[Got it, Master!]

Since the zombies weren't strong enough to make me use Spirit Aura, I left Peika to act independently. As her lightning was getting stronger by the day, she could easily take care of the zombies by herself as long as she had my mana. The 21st floor's monsters were weak individually, but there were many of them. As such, I couldn't just leisurely hunt them.

[You obtained 70 gold.]

[You obtained 80 gold.]

[You obtained 75 gold.]

As they were so weak, each of them gave less than 100 gold. However, with so many of them, the gold piled up at an incredible rate. Ignoring the annoying messages ringing out in my ear, I quickly made my way through the dungeon. Ellos had described the 21st floor as 'turtle-paced advances in a situation where tension devoured reason,' but I didn't know just where the tension was or where I was supposed to be turtle-paced.

Gulping down the lowest-grade Mana Potions I was overflowing with, I ran forward as I used Tempest. Peika flew in front of me, burning the zombies coming from directions I didn't face. Just like that, I succeeded in breaking through the 21st floor in just two hours.

[You became level 22. You obtained the qualification to enter the 22nd floor.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[In all of First Dungeon's history, you broke through the 21st floor in the shortest amount of time. This record will remain for long time to come. You obtained the title, 'Master of Divine Speed.' Your speed permanently increases by 3 percent.]

[Divine Speed becomes level 2. When used, it uses 19 percent of your mana and multiplies your speed by 550 percent for 0.55 seconds.]

“Shin-nim, why are you ba... Eh? This is the 21st Floor Shop, right?”

“Yep. I just broke through. Why didn't you tell me there was a reward for breaking through the dungeon quickly?”

Loretta had her mouth open like an idiot. She then spoke as she stared at me.

“Because I didn't think someone would break through the 21st floor in just two hours... Usually, two months is considered fast.”

“Is the 22nd floor like the 21st floor?”

“Yes? Ah, yes, it's more or less the same until the 24th floor. That's when ghouls start to appear. But wait, ah, Shin-nim!”

“See you in a bit!”

[You became level 23. You obtained the qualification to enter the 23rd floor.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[You swiftly broke through, sweeping through the 21st and 22nd floor zombies. You obtained the title, ‘Zombie Slaughterer.’ You gain 10 percent increased damage and resistance when fighting undead monsters. This effect becomes 20 percent when fighting zombies and ghouls.]

[You became level 24. You obtained the qualification to enter the 24th floor.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[The dungeon will remember this day for all eternity. You set a grand record of clearing the 21st through 23rd floors in just 5 hours. You obtained the title, ‘Incarnation of Lightning.’ Your speed permanently increases by 3 percent. Your affinity to the lightning element increases greatly.]

[You obtained the special passive skill, ‘Dash.’ When you run,

your speed increases greatly and you will not get tired easily.  
The skill proficiency will increase the more you run.]

When I was about to enter the 24th floor to do the same, Loretta hurriedly ran out from the Floor Shop and blocked my way. It was the first time I saw her come out of the Floor Shop.

“Shin-nim, stop! It’s dangerous to recklessly charge through the 24th floor!”

“Huff, huff... O-Okay. Let me take a breath then.”

I became stronger with titles. Focused solely on that, I overworked myself. I first put some oxygen back in my tired body and regained my composure. When I looked back up, I saw Loretta glaring angrily at me.

“No matter how good titles are, how could you use brush past the 22nd Floor Shop where I was waiting? What a rude explorer!”

“Eh, that was the problem?”

“...”

Loretta turned away silently. She seemed angry.

“Sorry. I’ll always visit the Floor Shop from now on, so don’t be



angry.”

“... Ramen.”

“Yeah, yeah. I’ll bring you some.”

“Mm, okay. Then take some rest now.”

Loretta appeased her anger and smiled. Since she had brought it up, I decided to eat here as well. Taking out the necessary tools from my inventory, I cooked up some ramen for Loretta and me. Loretta cheered loudly as she stared fixedly at the boiling ramen.

“By the way, Loretta, I heard monsters above the 21st floor dropped Residential Area Entrance Tickets.”

“That’s right, Shin-nim. What about it?”

Loretta’s eyes were still fixed on the boiling ramen. It was almost ready now.

“They didn’t drop any. I must have killed at least ten thousand monsters as I charged through the last 3 floors.”

“You shouldn’t think so simply. Residential Area Entrance Tickets are super rare.”

“Super?”

“Super.”

Loretta picked up her chopsticks as she answered solemnly. She was silently telling me to give her ramen. Putting ramen in her bowl, I complained in a murmur.

“Damn it, when will I get to go? What use is there if I have a Special Mansion Purchase Ticket if I can’t use it?”

“... Special Mansion?”

Loretta’s eyes suddenly became wide with her mouth still full of ramen. Watching her trying to swiftly swallow the ramen, I couldn’t help but think how cute she looked.

“Yep, Special Mansion. I got it from hunting the Lizard Knight alone.”

“The only ownerless Special Mansion in the First Dungeon is Marianne’s Garden. Then... WHOO!”

Loretta suddenly clenched her fist and shot it up in the air as she shouted in joy. Watching her with a curious look, my eyes then met her own. Loretta seemed to have regained her composure as she slowly dropped her fist and avoided my eyes.

“Whoo?”

“I-It’s nothing! Nothing at all!”

“...”

“Come on, let’s eat ramen! Ramen~!”

Another unsolvable mystery had appeared.

After filling my stomach with ramen, I did some quick equipment maintenance and bought five more bottles of Holy Water. Then I heard about the 24th floor from Loretta.

“Shin-nim, you know about ghouls, right?”

“Kind of. If zombies were resurrected corpses, then aren’t ghouls monsters that appear in graveyards and feed on corpses?”

“Yes, that’s what Earth’s dungeon explorers say. However, their origins or methods of reproduction don’t matter. What’s important is how strong they are.”

She explained that ghouls were in a different league than zombies. First was in speed. Ghouls were incomparable to zombies in speed. They were also strong and tough. Their skin could easily make steel bounce off and their powerful claws even possessed strong neurotoxins. Furthermore, even if they were injured, they

could recover by devouring the flesh of other zombies.

Not only did it have high attack, defense, and speed, it also had portable potions all around it! Just from their description, they couldn't be more terrifying. Loretta put up her index finger and advised.

“The moment you see them, send its head flying or pierce its heart. Got it?”

“Tsk, looks like I'll have to give up on progressing quickly.”

“Don't even try. If the number of ghouls start increasing, even Shin-nim would be in dire straits.”

“Thanks for the kind explanation, Loretta.”

“T-That'll be 500 gold for the information, customer.”

At my words of gratitude, Loretta put out her hand and looked away with an 'oops' expression. I wondered why she was asking for gold when I thanked her. Life really was full of mysteries.

The dungeon generally had the same structure across floors. It was as wide as a castle's hallways and the ceiling was high so that you couldn't actually see it. Torches hung on the side stone walls, lighting up the passageway. If you kept following the hallway, the path twisted and turned. If you kept following the path, you would end up in front of the staircase to the next floor. Although there

were some crossroads, they all led to the same destination. It was just a matter of going straight or taking a roundabout way.

However, the 24th floor different. First, the pathway was narrow and the floor wasn't hard. Second, there were cross-like objects stuck here and there. The fire of the torches also gave off an ominous aura. It felt like my HP would drop just by being in this place.

[This is a place full of death, Master.]

Peika spoke, brushing her dress as if something had gotten on it. I tightened my grip on the Black Earthen Spear and observed my surroundings. Even the undead could get poisoned, as they still had flesh and blood. As Black Earthen Spear's poison was one that burned blood and devoured bones, I had nothing to fear as long as I had it.

I believed in Loretta, but I didn't let myself become too nervous. If I let myself get scared by something like ghouls, I couldn't become the strongest!

“Commence Exploration!”

## Chapter 48. Hermes (3)

---

“Commence Exploration!”

The moment I shouted out with spirit, the crosses nearby trembled and then shot up. As I thought, they were graves. What popped out from them were, of course, zombies. As if to show that they were different from the 23rd floor zombies, their corpse bodies were much more intact. They even carried swords and shields, or bows and arrows.

“Guooooo...”

“Warrior’s... blood...”

Zombie warriors. Unlike zombies that were born from corpses imbued with mana, the zombie warriors were said to be born in large numbers when the night’s magic power seeped into the corpses of low-class soldiers left on battlefields after large-scale battles.

They were known to always appear in large numbers, and they would sometimes turn the people they killed into zombies, adding to their zombie army.

However, there weren’t that many zombie warriors in front of me. They were likely poor souls who were forced to fight when they were alive and could not rest even after they died.

“Blood... war...”

“Calls... us...”

I gulped down a mouthful of saliva as I watched them slowly getting up with their weapons and rolling their eyes in their decayed eye sockets.

“Tempest!”

When I lightly attacked with my spear, the zombie warriors exploded into pieces and scattered.

They were extremely weak.

“Guooooo!”

“So it still works.”

[It’s because Master is strong!]

Although they were stronger than normal zombies, I was strengthened by all sorts of elixirs and even had the level 4 high-rank spear technique. It was slightly embarrassing to say with my own mouth, but I was in a completely different league than normal explorers on the 24th floor.

It seemed that even after hearing I had cleared 21st through 23rd floor in 5 hours, Loretta did not know me well. My overwhelming superiority would not change just because zombies were upgraded to zombie warriors or because ghouls appeared.

“Guooo! Human, living, breathing human!”

“Hot blood, soft skin! Human!”

More zombie warriors got up from their graves. At the same time, I saw ghouls trying to ambush me by shooting out of the gaps in the dungeon’s walls. They were certainly faster than the zombies, had tougher bodies, and had claws that gleamed threateningly.

Moreover, their eyes clearly showed signs of intelligence. That said, they only seemed to think about devouring me.

“Come, you ghoul bastards! I’ll return you to your graves!”

Previously, as I heard Loretta’s words, this was what I thought. Even if they were fast, could they be faster than ratmen? Even if they were strong, how much stronger could they be compared to the lizardmen? As for their claws containing neurotoxin, I could just avoid them. Even if I were hit, I wouldn’t be poisoned unless they could break through my helmet and armor.

Of course, because Loretta warned me about them so much, I decided to come to a conclusion after fighting them first.



“Guooooooooo!”

“Humaaaaaaan!”

They were slightly faster than ratmen. However, my physical ability was completely different than when I fought the ratmen. I could see the ghouls’ movements clearly.

If I wanted to dodge them, I could do so with ease. However, if I faced many of them at once, I was bound to be hit by one or two attacks. In that case, knowing how strong their attacks were would help me clear the 24th floor more easily.

Thinking all this in the short instant that the ghouls were coming toward me, I stood in the trajectory of its claws. Bracing myself for impact, I prepared to counterattack.

However, the moment their claws hit my armor, an absurdity I never expected happened.

Snap.

“Ghoul, claw broke! Ghoul hurt!”

“Hurt!”

“Ghoul claw hurt!”

“Ghoul weak! Super weak!”

I had not even used Dragon Skin, but the ghouls’ claws broke upon hitting my armor, and they ran away with pained faces. Why did this happen, again? Oh, right! I had heard that if my defense was overwhelmingly higher than their attack, the weapons of the attacking enemies would break.

Defense was calculated using HP, constitution, equipment, and how much mana you used to strengthen your body. With high-rank martial arts, my body was further strengthened, which then affected my defense as well.

“Ghoul hurt!”

“Ghoul return. Ghoul hurt!”

“Ghoul call stronger ghoul! Strong ghoul take revenge!”

“Can you guys stop crying like little kids!? And don’t talk like you’re calling your older brother after being hit by the local delinquent!”

As I was wearing the Dark Ratman’s Leather Armor set until the 20th floor, my defense wasn’t all that high. Now that I was wearing the Lizard Knight Set and had increased my constitution, normal monsters couldn’t pierce through my defense anymore. As I had never let myself be hit by the zombies, it was only now that I

found out. Even if I did let the zombies hit me, I wouldn't have thought that even the 24th floor's ghouls couldn't do any damage...

After realizing all this, I stood still and blankly stared into the sky. Meanwhile, the injured ghouls (except the one that went to call his... brother) were devouring nearby zombies while complaining about how much pain they were in. Once they finished, they attacked me again, broke their claws, and went back to eating zombies...

“Ghoul recover!”

“Eat zombie, recover!”

“Ghoul attack! Ghoul hurt!”

“Ghoul claw hurt!”

“Ghoul go back!”

What did they call this? Macro? Looking at the ghouls sprawled around me with disappointed eyes, I held up my Black Earthen Spear and aimed at them. Although I was starting to like the way they talked, I didn't need to hesitate now that I knew how weak they were.

“Peika, take as much mana as you need and open a way in front of me. I'm going to run.”

[Okay, Master! I like running too!]

Under my permission, Peika, who started to freely take my mana, shone with a radiant light. Soon, sparks flickers from her body. She then charged forward, burning every zombie and ghoul in her path to crisp. The zombies were, of course, killed instantly, and the ghouls staggered after taking huge damage. Without hesitation, I lifted my foot off the ground. It was time to make use of my special passive skill, Dash.

“Uoooooooo! Clear the paaaaath!”

The moment I lifted my foot off the ground, the surrounding scenery began to be pushed backwards. The zombies stared at me with blank expressions. The ghouls that came after me bounced right off.

They then clumped up and tried to block my path forward. However, like exploding grenade shells, they were sent flying in all directions by Peika’s lightning and my charge.

‘Fast! This Dash skill, I like it!’

If Ren saw me right now, he would regretfully say, ‘So it really was possible to make your legs disappear!’ Now that I thought about it, Ren had not contacted me since we parted. Did he lose after challenging the Floor Master alone? If so, I was going to need to start thrashing phase season 2...

“Guooo!”

“Ghoul dying!”

Just by pointing my mana-strengthened spear forward as I ran using Dash, the zombies and ghouls in my way were all sent flying. Even if the ghouls’ bodies were stronger than steel, I could pierce a 5-centimeter-thick plate of steel with my spear at the age of 14. My current strength was incomparable to back then. Ghouls were no different than zombies in the face of my dashing.

I didn’t check whether the monsters sent flying were dead or alive. I didn’t need them to be dead to clear the floor. I just had to get to the end of the pathway alive.

In the past, I believed I needed to kill all the monsters to clear the floor. However, that was only because I would likely be killed by the monsters otherwise. Killing all the monsters wasn’t a necessary condition to clear a floor. I had heard some dungeon explorers honed their stealth abilities to the max so they could clear dungeon floors while avoiding battles as much as possible.

Regardless, I was currently running while ignoring most of the zombies and ghouls. Even so, because of all the monsters Peika was killing and the ones who died after colliding with me, I constantly heard gold piling up.

At some point, I hit a large ghoul and realized he was not sent flying after colliding with my spear. I realized at that point.

“Krrrrrr! Kruka punish human!”

“You’re the older brother ghoul!”

“Krrrrrr!”

I first cut off the head of a ghoul glaring at me from the side, and checked my remaining mana. Because Peika was continuously taking my mana, I only had about 50 percent of my total mana left. The large ghoul was over 2 meters tall, and had a freakishly large right arm. Judging by the color of the right arm’s skin, it was undoubtedly stronger than other parts.

“Peika, come in my spear!”

[Okay!]

“Krrrrrr! I kill! Then I beat and make tender!”

The moment I activated Spirit Aura, Kruka swung his massive right arm at me. Although I dodged the attack, fully aware of its trajectory, its direction suddenly changed mid-air and chased after me. Startled, I hurriedly ducked and rushed to his body. Whether it was monster or human, fighting became easier when the enemy was an arm’s distance away than when he was right up to your shoulder. Kruka was no exception. Without knowing what to do, he tried to strike me using his entire arm.

“Hap!”

With a short, spirited shout, I shot my spear toward his head. He was still a named monster. His much tougher head did not explode out like all the other ghouls' heads. He only let out a painful scream. Immediately afterwards, I was struck by his forearm. Although it was heavy enough to make me groan, I did not receive much damage, as I had minimized the amount of impact force I received.

Holding in my pain, I shot out my spear again. It hit the same area, and his poisonous blood spurted out into the air.

“Kruk! Annoying prey!”

“Only eating meat isn't good for you! In your next life, eat some goddamn vegetables!”

Kruka attacked once again with his large arm. This time, however, his arm split into two mid-flight. Was he still considered a ghoul? He was a mutant! I would be severely injured if that thing hit me, I didn't particularly think to dodge it.

I simply concentrated my body's energy and mana and shot forward with my spear. It was an attack that used 20 percent of my HP and MP!

“Heroic Strike!”

White light combined with Spirit Aura enveloped the spear, giving it an imposing look similar to Heavenly God's lightning. At the same time, it exploded Kruka's head into oblivion. His arm had no chance to strike me.

In the next moment, a message flowed into my ear.

[You defeated the named monster 'Kruka'! You obtained 'Event Dungeon Entrance Ticket: Giant Zombie's Attack!' as a reward!]

"... Why did I get a zombie-related dungeon from a ghoul?"

Wait, that was the wrong reaction.

"Yes! An Event Dungeon!"

That was the right one!



## Chapter 49. Hermes (4)

---

[You became level 25. You obtained the qualification to challenge the Floor Master.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[Above those that fly are those that leap through dimensions. You cleared the 21st through 24th floors in under 7 hours. Just your courage, audacity, and swiftness are enough to place you in the ranks of Great Explorers. You have a choice. You can obtain the title ‘Hermes’ by giving up the three titles obtained from clearing 21st, 22nd, and 23rd floors. Or, you can obtain the title ‘Incarnation of Light’ by combining the ‘Master of Divine Speed’ and ‘Incarnation of Lightning’ titles.]

[Divine Speed becomes level 3. When used, it uses 18 percent of your mana and multiplies your speed by 570 percent for 0.7 seconds.]

[Dash becomes low-rank level 5. You can run swiftly for a longer time without feeling tired. You receive bonuses to instantaneous evasive maneuvers.]

Loretta looked at me with a dumbfounded expression. I smiled bashfully in response.

“It’s been two hours.”

“Shin-nim... You became level 25 in just two hours... How?”

“I wonder? Hahaha.”

When I smiled awkwardly, Loretta puffed her cheeks angrily. She then reached forward with her hands and pinched my cheeks. It didn't hurt at all.

“I was worried. That Shin-nim would go wild without heed to my warning. It was just as I expected, too. Though, I didn't think you'd actually succeed.”

“The ghouls couldn't get through my defense.”

“Haa, really, what am I going to do with you?”

Loretta let go of my cheeks and let out a deep sigh.

“Do you understand, Shin-nim? Shin-nim just leveled up four times in just 7 hours. I assume you already distributed your level-up stat points. No matter how confident you are in your physical ability, you won't be able to fully bring out the power of level 25 for a while.”

“Because of the update, right?”

“Right. I don't even need to ask, but you were planning on going

through the 25th floor and challenging the Floor Master right away, right?”

I flinched at her pinpoint accuracy. To be honest, I was feeling quite self-confident after breaking all the way through the 24th floor. I remembered my fight with the 20th Floor Master, and was excited from thinking about the reward I would get for being the first to defeat the 25th Floor Master solo in my first try. I planned to keep running forward... but it seemed my plans were discovered. As expected, after 5 years of watching over me, Loretta knew me quite well.

“No way. You need to rest. Just do some light exercise if you want to work out. For at least 5 hours! Although even 5 hours shouldn’t be enough, with Shin-nim’s physical ability, you’ll at least grow somewhat used to it. Make sure you rest for 3 hours afterwards. Do you understand?”

“I got it, so don’t look at me with such scary eyes.”

I smiled bitterly. Then, I remembered the message I got when I broke through the 24th floor. The message that asked me to make a choice. I decided to ask Loretta about it since I was curious.

“Loretta, if you had to choose between Hermes and Incarnation of Light, which would you choose?”

“Hm? What an interesting question. Why do you ask?”

Loretta became absorbed in thought. She had her index finger on her cheek and was tapping on it as she thought seriously about my question. It seemed she had soon come to a decision as she told me.

“The incarnation of an element, or a god. Although I’d prefer to choose the element, the other side isn’t an incarnation, but a god’s name. In that case, there’s really only once choice. A god’s true name possesses his equivalent power. So Hermes. Hermes is what I’d choose.”

“I see. I didn’t really understand though.”

When I said that, Loretta gave me a cute grin, as if to say ‘that’s what I thought.’ She then asked.

“Where did Shin-nim hear about that? Regardless of which myth, to hear a god’s name in the dungeon, you should at least be on the 50th floor... Are you friends with a Gold rank explorer?”

“Ah, no, I’ve just been told to choose between those two titles.”

“... What?”

“You know, between Hermes and Incarnation of Light.”

“WHAT!?”

Loretta’s eyes quickly widened. Then she grabbed my shoulders

abruptly.

“Hermes! Hurry, hurry! Before another miracle happens and some other explorer takes the true name before Shin-nim! Hurry!!!”

“O-Okay! I’ll choose Hermes!”

Even as I was being shaken by Loretta, I made my will known. In that instant, a fanfare rang out.

[You became the first explorer on Earth to obtain a god’s true name! Congratulations! For accomplishing this Grand Achievement, you receive 3 skill points. Current skill points: 9]

[You obtained the title ‘Hermes.’ Your speed increases by 15 percent. All stats increase by 5. You obtained the qualification. Your affinity to all elements increases, and your affinity to the wind element increases greatly. Once per day, you can summon ‘Talaria’ for 10 minutes. Talaria allows you to step in the air freely and even fly. However, when inside the dungeon, you cannot use it for the pure purpose of moving around. As your body familiarizes itself to the true name, more abilities will become open.]

“D-Did you get it? Did you?”

“Yes.”

The moment I earned the Hermes title, I felt my body become significantly lighter. Even taking into account two of the three deleted titles that raised my speed by 6 percent, my speed rose by 9 percent. It wasn't too surprising that my body felt so light. Not to mention, my strength and dexterity went up by 5 each as well.

Being able to move 15 percent quicker was nice. That said, it seemed I would need more than one or two days to get used to this speed. In fact, until I grasped my physical ability in detail and knew every little change to it, I felt this ability would do more harm than good for a little while. In exchange, once I got used to the change, the increase in my strength would be incomparable to if someone else received the same ability.

Plus, there was Talaria. It was the name of Hermes' winged sandals. Although it was only for 10 minutes every day, being able to fly had great benefits. Of course, this would also take more than a day or two to get used to.

Most important was the fact that there was more I hadn't unlocked. As my body familiarized itself to the true name... that short statement was crucial. I would be getting more abilities in the future. I was dazed. I didn't even know why I was able to obtain Hermes. It was a title in a completely different league than the titles from the 21st through 23rd floors.

“To think you'd really obtain Hermes's true name. You did it, Shin-nim! You obtained the qualification!”

“What qualification?”

“Ut! Ah... mm... That’s a secret for now.”

‘As I thought.’ I couldn’t help but smile. A god’s true name must represent something other than just raw stats. I could just slowly find out. If it was necessary to me right now, I knew Loretta would have explained it to me.

Hermes’ true name was certainly an amazing ability. But in a way, although it was amazing, it wasn’t enough to completely change my identity. It was important that I didn’t get too self-confident. Although I might be the first to have obtained Hermes’ true name, Earth shouldn’t be the only world with myths. In that case, it wouldn’t be weird if there were other dungeon explorers who obtained the true names of gods from their myths.

“Why would Hermes appear here? Ah, I see. Hermes is the messenger god, but he is also the emissary who guides deceased souls to the Underworld. Since that’s the case, he must have been affected by all the zombies and ghouls that were slaughtered in such a short amount of time. Though, the biggest reason had to be the record speed clears that had never happened in First Dungeon’s history...”

“Loretta?”

“Eh? Ah, it’s nothing! Nothing at all, Shin-nim! In any case, congratulations! Hermes’ power will be of great help to you in the

days to come. But...”

“But?”

Loretta raised her index finger and advised me in a solemn voice I’d never heard from her before.

“A god’s true name is heavy, Shin-nim. Remember that a day will come when you will have to pay the cost of using his name, so don’t become too drunk on its power. Thankfully, Hermes isn’t a god known for his battle prowess.”

“That’s something to be thankful about?”

“Huhu, Shin-nim is only a level 25 explorer. It will be hard for you to handle a god’s power at that level. In fact, you have a greater chance of falling from losing yourself in its power. It’s only because it’s Hermes that it would be of help to Shin-nim.”

“Am I not understanding because of my low intelligence?”

Although I said that, I did kind of have an idea what she meant. For example, let’s say I obtained the true name of Athena, who was known as the goddess of war. I would end up relying on her power more than my own, which would be no different than relying on others’ strengths. Even if I tried to find my own style again later, it would be too late. I could only continue climbing the dungeon with something wrong.



On the other hand, Hermes' power was entirely supportive in nature. Using it in battle would only increase my battle prowess. As it needed my strength as a basis, Hermes was indeed an excellent ability.

I couldn't help but be incredibly happy at the fact that my desire to quickly climb the dungeon led to such results.

"Sorry to say this while you're so happy, but there is bad news as well."

"Bad news?"

When I stared at Loretta fixedly, she put out her hand.

"Before that, I'll need 30,000 gold for the information cost."

"Do I have to buy it?"

"Shin-nim, I always want to keep a win-win relationship with you. Without money, I'm not allowed to open my mouth, and if Shin-nim doesn't hear what I have to say, you will come to regret it slightly."

Loretta was giving me a hint. After all, there had to be a reason why she brought it up in the first place. 30,000 gold wasn't big enough to risk breaking our friendly relationship.

“Okay. Here, 30,000 gold.”

Most importantly, with the large amount of gold I had gained from clearing the Event Dungeon, I didn't need to worry too much about spending gold frivolously. Loretta mumbled a quiet 'yes' and took my money.

“The glory of succeeding in the 25th Floor Master solo raid on the first try was taken by a foreign world's Hero 1,500 years ago.”

“Gek!”

It really was bad news! Like Loretta said, I would have regretted it if I didn't hear it, but I didn't want to have to pay 30,000 gold to hear it! The satisfaction of obtaining Hermes' true name disappeared, and I stooped my shoulders.

“The 30,000 gold was for this piece of information as well as the information about the 20th Floor Master from before. Although it was on credit... with this, Shin-nim and I won't have to receive any penalties. Whew, thank goodness I don't need to hear from that oldie aga... Ah.”

Loretta put her hands over her mouth in the middle of talking. I got the feeling she was intentionally doing it to give me some information. When I looked at her with narrow eyes, she stuck her tongue out and said, “ehet.” It was so cute that I almost fell for her.

After letting out a dry cough, I asked her.

“In that case, can I know about the availability of the ‘first’ for 30th and 35th floors?”

“Yep, that’ll be 50,000 gold, customer.”

... Maybe she really was just hungry for gold. Watching her smile so happily, I imagined myself flicking her forehead.

## Chapter 50. Hermes (5)

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“The 30th and 35th floor’s first achievement have been completed as well by the same Hero from 1,500 years ago.”

“How unfortunate, Shin-nim. Luckily, the next one is... oops.”

For a piece of information worth 50,000 gold, it made me feel nothing but emptiness. However, from Loretta’s ‘accidental’ follow up, it seemed the 40th Floor Master’s first had not been taken. That was enough. Until then, I’d refrain from being too adventurous and focus on obtaining the Floor Master slayer title. Afterwards, I could ‘master’ the 40th Floor Master.

The only problem left to solve now was to break through the 25th floor and join Ellos and Palludia.

As the 25th floor had a mix of zombies and ghouls just like the 24th floor, I could easily get through it. However, as it also had a Floor Master room, I could not obtain a title from clearing it. When I arrived in front of the Floor Master door, I stopped and contacted Ellos.

“Ellos, are you on the 25th floor?”

[Mm, yeah. I’m near the end. I’ll be at the ‘door’ soon. What about you? Can you really come here on your own? We can party with you if you want.]

“I’m in front of the door. The 25th floor’s.”

[... Really?]

“Really.”

Ellos went silent for a while, then continued after laughing.

[I see. You are a ‘Hero’ after all. I’ll hurry, see you in a bit.]

“Yeah.”

I then contacted Palludia.

“Palludia, it’s Kang Shin.”

[What? I told you not to contact me before reaching the 25th floor.]

For someone who said that, she answered extremely quickly, as if she’d been waiting. As I didn’t want get on her nerves, I only said what I wanted to say.

“I’m on the 25th floor.”

[Really?]

“I don’t lie.”

[... Okay, good job. Huhu, Shina you liar. As I thought, rather than you, he prefers...]

“Hm?”

I felt like I had heard a familiar name. However, Palludia said it was nothing.

[I’ve been on the 25th floor since two weeks ago! But because I was busy with my world’s war, coincidentally, really coincidentally, I couldn’t enter the dungeon for a while. My first time challenging the Floor Master will be with you. You should think of it as an honor!]

“That reminds me of the first time we fought the Orc Lord.”

[Don’t bring that up! That was a long time ago. I’m no longer a little kid!]

If I looked at all the messages she sent me until now, she was undoubtedly still the same little kid. Of course, I didn’t say that to her either.

“Ellos says he’ll be here in a bit. Let’s wait for him and we can challenge the Floor Master together.”

[Okay. Hey, I heard you stayed in the 5th floor for over 3 years. Are you sure your skills haven't turned rusty? Since you'll be in this Palludia Gren Ehuir-nim's raid party, I won't allow stupid, orc-like things!]

"I also climbed to the 25th floor in under a year. Palludia, you've heard of my Crown Prince nickname, right?"

[Pfft.]

Palludia snorted. In that instant, I felt my blood boiling.

"Don't laugh! It's not funny!"

[O-Orc is Crown Prince... Pfft, pff.]

"Eeeek! I'm not an orc anymore, you little kid!"

[I'm not a little kid either! Boo, boo! I'll be the one to judge whether you're still an orc or not, so look forward to it!]

"Fine! I'll also be the one to judge whether you're a little kid or not! Hmph!"

In the end, we ended our conversation after a little argument. Ah, I forgot to ask why she wanted to party with me after so long.

This childish crown princess really was unpredictable. She started an argument when we first met, she charged at the Orc Lord with just her staff because her friend was killed, and she added me to her friend list even though she seemed to hate me.

I would find out soon enough. Since I promised Palludia, it felt wrong to fight the Floor Master before I met up with her and Ellos. What should I do now?

Upon thinking about it, the answer was clear. It was to use the Event Dungeon Entrance Ticket I got from the 24th floor and clear the dungeon.

### [Event Dungeon Entrance Ticket: Giant Zombie's Attack

An entrance ticket to an Event Dungeon. If ripped in half, it allows up to two people to enter the Event Dungeon. Recommended level: 25-30.]

Looking at the description, I felt conflicted. Should I contact Palludia again? No, wait, was I high? Why would I enter a dungeon alone with that yappy little kid? With that, I erased the thought from my head. What other choice did I have? Ellos was still trying to get to the door... What about Shina? No, Shina shouldn't even be at the 20th floor yet.

In the end, father was the only choice I had. He was the only



person I could fully trust to cover my back.

“Father.”

[What’s up, son?]

“What floor are you on, father?”

[I’m on the 25th. Why, do you want to party with your father? I refuse. My contribution will go down if I party with you.]

Since his reason for saying no was a roundabout way of praising me, I felt a bit embarrassed. Scratching my head, I continued.

“I have an Event Dungeon Entrance Ticket.”

[Hurry up and invite me to the party.]

Father’s attitude took a complete turn. What fervor, greed, and initiative! Though I didn’t want to admit it, I took after him too much!

After accepting my party request, father appeared. He was wearing the same clothes as when he was in Yeungdeungpo’s Event Dungeon. The only difference was that he was wearing the bracelet he earned as reward on his right wrist.

“Oh, what an excellent spear! Where did you get it?”

“Ah, mm, a named monster dropped it.”

I didn't think he'd ask that right away! Father's eyes sparkled at the word 'named monster.'

“Named monsters, I love those guys. I wish they appeared more often. They have a nice tactile feeling too, when I hit them.”

“You're probably the only one who wants to fight them because you like the feeling of hitting their flesh. Anyways, are you ready?”

“Yeah. You see, I cleared the 24th floor pretty quick and got a 'One Who Dashes Through Graveyards' title. It lets me deal 20 percent more damage to all undead monsters with physical bodies. Amazing, isn't it!?”

“Oh, it is, father!”

I didn't tell him I received a similar title as well as a god's true name. I knew how to care for father's pride. I was a filial son, unlike my childish father!

After confirming that we were in a party, I ripped the entrance ticket in half. In an instant, the surrounding scenery melted. If Earth's Event Dungeons could be entered through Gates, entering an Event Dungeon in the dungeon was like us being on TV and someone changing the TV channel with us still standing in place.

Eventually, the surroundings stopped warping and we found ourselves on a plain with arrows raining down.

“Uwat!”

“What’s this!?”

We quickly struck the arrows flying toward us and surveyed the area. It was a battlefield. Soldiers wearing different armor were stabbing each other with swords, while archers and magicians were attacking from long-range even at the cost of hitting their allies. It was a place where humans slaughtered humans. When I realized this, I got a dull headache and my breathing became rough.

‘Snap out of it, Kang Shin! Don’t let something like this scare you! How can you become the world’s strongest if you’re so weak?’

No matter how I tried to regain my composure, it was true that I was in an incomprehensible situation. Shouldn’t I be in an Event Dungeon?

“Who are you!?”

I saw a soldier attacking me with his sword as he asked for my identity. As I couldn’t kill another human being, I lightly parried his spear and sent it flying. The spear then landed about 20 meters away, piercing one of the corpses lying on the ground. At least, I

hoped that it was a corpse. I entered an Event Dungeon, I didn't want to suddenly become a murderer.

“Father, let's get away from here for now. We'll be targeted if we stay here.”

“I agree.”

Soldiers from both sides came after us like fire ants. We sent each of them flying as we ran. As we were like erasers making the part of the battlefield we were in empty, everyone on the battlefield began to eye us.

“Who are they!?”

“Kill them first!”

“Attack, attack!”

Even if the soldiers hit me, they would not even be able to scratch me. However, the magicians were a different story. It was why I was quickly trying to escape this battlefield.

“Didn't the entrance ticket say 'giant zombie's attack'?”

“Yes, it did.”

“Then what’s this? Are these people even real?”

“Don’t ask me, son. Your father isn’t that bright either.”

Because I felt like I was getting stupider the more I talked with father, I stopped thinking altogether. If I knew this would happen, I would have asked Loretta more about Event Dungeons. Was my intelligence not done updating? Just how rarely did I use my brain... ah, a fireball!

“Father, dodge it!”

“Eit!”

Father lightly swung his spear and shot out a shockwave. The fireball collided with the shockwave and exploded, killing the nearby soldiers.

Although a countless number of people were already dying in this battlefield, I became annoyed after finding out people had died from the fireball father exploded. I barely held in my desire to curse aloud. Although these soldiers were trying to kill us, I couldn’t help myself from how I felt.

At that moment, a message rang out.

[You obtained 70 gold.]

“... Father, these guys are monsters.”

“I heard it too.”

At least, I did not know any human that dropped gold when they died. Although I had faced numerous humanoid monsters, I didn't think the dungeon would actually send humans as monsters. I suddenly felt that this Event Dungeon had a terrible personality.

“Son, they were created when we entered the Event Dungeon. They aren't actual humans, so you don't need to feel sorry.”

“You don't need to worry about my mental health, father. I know fully well what they are. I just don't like the fact that I have to kill them, when they are so much like humans.”

“Then do you want to get away from here first? Going by its name, a giant zombie should appear eventually.”

“Yeah, let's... Thanks, father.”

“Don't say that. It gives me goosebumps.”

“Actually, I got goosebumps too from that.”

As we both scratched the goosebumps on our skin, we hurried off the battlefield. Although there were soldiers coming after us like

flies, we took care of them softly as we made our escape.

Eventually, we reached a place where the shouts of the battlefield became faint. It was only then that we realized how big the battlefield was. From the hill we were on, we could see the battlefield stretching out across the horizon.

In the vast plain without even a single hint of greenery, the corpses of soldiers were piled up and blood flowed like a river. Although I had seen a lot of monster corpses, they couldn't match up to the cruel scene of humans killing other humans. We had escaped the battlefield, but the fight continued. It seemed it would not end until one side was completely eliminated. Just how many people would die here? 100,000? 200,000?

“After monsters appeared on Earth, do you think the conflicts between different countries increased or decreased?”

When I was watching this scene blankly, father asked me. After thinking about it for a little while, I answered.

“Wouldn't it have decreased? After all, we have to fight against the monsters.”

“It increased. Countries that shared borders began fighting as they claimed that the other country should be responsible for cleaning up the monsters that appeared on their borders. Countries that had low military strength, but high-valued monsters, were invaded by stronger countries for their monsters, and the ability users of the weaker countries then joined to fight

against the invaders. Although it did not lead to full scale war in most cases, there are places where small conflicts expanded into much bigger ones.”

“ ... ”

Father went silent for a bit, then continued.

“Human greed draws blood of other humans. This much hasn’t changed. I won’t tell you to do something stupid like trying to stop it, but become stronger. Otherwise, you’ll be swept away by human greed one day.”

“Of course. I plan on becoming the world’s strongest.”

“Your father will still be the world’s strongest.”

“It will be me!”

There, we had a minor battle. I had come to add another win to my name.



## Chapter 51. Hermes (6)

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It was only after about two hours that the situation changed. At that time, father and I were roasting some pork belly over a hot grill. Although the soldiers on the battlefield looked and acted like humans, after we realized they were monsters created by the dungeon, we stopped caring whether they killed or partied with each other.

“Father, why do you have pork belly in your inventory? Nom, nom.”

“Gulp. Don’t you know? If you put meat in your inventory, it’ll be fresher than if you stored it in the most high-tech refrigerator! You can store it right after you cut it for maximum freshness!”

“Ah, I’ve tested that before too!”

I used the same principle when I bought Yua a hamburger. I see, so that’s why father carried around meat in his inventory! Although I frequently ate my meals in the dungeon, I had never thought to bring meat. As expected of a dungeon explorer of 27 years! So he didn’t just hunt orcs for 20 years!

“Here, have a drink.”

“Oh, I should really be the one to fill your glass.”

After exchanging some soju, we joked around as we talked.

Suddenly, however, I felt a gaze on me.

“Father, did you notice that?”

“Eh? Notice what?”

I’ve thought this for a while, but father really did have weaker senses than me. I asked Peika who was sitting on my head drinking drops of alcohol from her mini elemental-sized cup.

“Peika, can you go survey the area?”

[Hmnya? Master, what’s a sumvay?]

“Ah...”

‘That’s not even a word...’ I realized Peika was immobilized. I didn’t know that elementals were weak to alcohol. It was my mistake. I had fallen for Peika’s cute plea of asking me for a juice she’d never seen before!

While I was distracted by Peika’s drunk appearance, the gaze watching us had disappeared. It seemed father had finally noticed something as he was looking around, but it was too late.

“Hm, was it the zombie?”

“Maybe it was an wild animal that wanted some meat.”

[Masteeeeer! What’s a sumvay!?!]

Of course, I didn’t think it was nothing. Even so, there was nothing we could do now except continue eating meat. As such, I decided to just let things be. Also, Peika, sumvay isn’t a word!

The twilight had passed and night time approached.

Father was the first to sleep, and I stood guard. After three hours, father got up and I slept. When I got up after three hours of sleep, it was still middle of the night. Under the dark, starless night sky, only a pale moon was lighting up the world.

It seemed the soldiers didn’t want to fight at night, as both sides had returned to their camps. However, the corpses of the dead soldiers were still on the battlefield. The nose-piercing stench of blood had permeated the battlefield and was even reaching where I was.

“It looks like those corpses will rise.”

“Of course. Where else would zombies come from?”

Keeping our eyes on the cruel battlefield, we snacked on some instant ramen. I realized that partying with father kept making me eat things. Usually, people ate less as they aged, but father always had something in his mouth, saying that a martial artist must eat

well. With this habit following him into the dungeon, his inventory was most likely filled with food.

Once I started focusing on the dungeon, I didn't like to eat anything before I cleared a floor. As such, it was a bit hard to match father's style. Peika, on the other hand, seemed to like ramen noodles, as she happily ate the ramen one noodle strand at a time.

[This is yummy. It doesn't exist in the Spirit Realm.]

“Eat lots.”

[Master, I love you!]

When I patted Peika on the head as she slurped more ramen noodles, father interrupted.

“What have you been talking to since a while ago?”

“I told you, I became an Elementalist.”

“Can I adopt one too?”

“Elementals aren't pets.”

“Ah, three got up.”

“Don’t count elementals like... what?”

“Three got up.”

I turned to face the battlefield. Under the moonlight, the once dead were rising. We could notice because of our heightened senses from level ups. It would take a while before each camp found out.

Father asked, “What do you want to do?”

“Hunt them, of course. I hate being backstabbed... so!” Answering father, I threw my spear into the darkness. I didn’t have enough time to use Spirit Aura, but Heroic Strike was still activated. With its radiant white light, it flew through the air like lightning. It was much faster than before. I was surprised as I did not know the 15 percent speed increase applied to thrown weapons.

“Kuk!”

[You obtained 1,500 gold.]

“Beldon died!”

“Those guys found out!”

“Kill them before they kill us!”

Immediately afterwards, I pointed my hands toward where the voices came from and ordered Peika.

“It’s already too late! Peika!”

[Thunder Blast!]

After gulping down the ramen noodle in her mouth, Peika shouted as she shone with a golden light. A bolt of lightning as thick as my arm shot out from her body, lighting up the darkness.

“The shield!”

“Kuk, the shield magic got broken!”

“An elemental? Who are they!?”

Immediately after I called Peika, I grabbed the Silver Spear from my inventory and charged forward. Thanks to Dash, my running speed was incomparably faster than before. My aim was the crowd in the distance whom I suspected were the ones responsible for making the zombies.

Father and I had both noticed them at the same time we noticed the zombies. There were five... no, four of them, since one of them

had already died. They all had black hoods draped over their heads and were carrying small wooden staves. They were the extremely small kind that magicians would carry around to hide their identity. With all the clues in front of me, I figured they were black magicians.

“S-Shield isn’t enough to stop him!”

“Damn it, r-run!”

“We should have been under stealth magic!”

They might have been able to deal with us if they immediately used magic, but instead, they panicked and hesitated. It could just be that their chants were too long or that they didn’t have the materials needed to cast magic. However, that was none of my business.

“W-Wait! Even if you kill us, you can’t stop what’s happening!”

One of them shouted in a high-pitched voice. It was a woman. However, since I had already decided to kill them, their sex did not matter. They were monsters. They were monsters.

Right. They were monsters.

“If we don’t kill you, what are you going to do to us?”

“Of course we’d kill—“

“Elemental Tempest!”

[Kukuku, owner of a strong power calls me.]

[Destruction. Flowing blood amidst ear-splitting screams. That is what I want.]

[He tore apart the black magicians. He’s just my type!]

Because of the place I was in, the elementals coming to assist me were all dark. Hopefully, they wouldn’t be weaker because of it. My spear was shining with black light from the elementals. I thrust forward, and a storm swept through the entire area.

“Darkness Arrow! Kuaaaak!”

“S-Shield! Kuk!”

Elemental Tempest was a skill that gravely injured even the Floor Masters. Some random magicians couldn’t possibly block it. Three of the black magicians failed in their attempts to block Elemental Tempest and were instantly torn to shreds. Although it was only for a moment, my eyes caught sight of a rather gruesome scene.

Damn it. I had used Elemental Tempest to kill them quickly, but I ended up seeing something unsightly. It was a good thing that the



monsters that died in the dungeon disappeared into thin air, only leaving behind their loot and not their remains.

“Kuhak! Haa, haa... damn it, so strong...!”

Coincidentally, the black magician, who had talked to briefly, was the only one who managed to escape the range of Elemental Tempest. It seemed she gave up trying to block it with magic and instead gave her all in using her legs to run. Even so, she could not completely dodge it. Her hood was ripped apart and her back was severely injured. Coughing up a mouthful of blood, she opened her mouth with great difficulty.

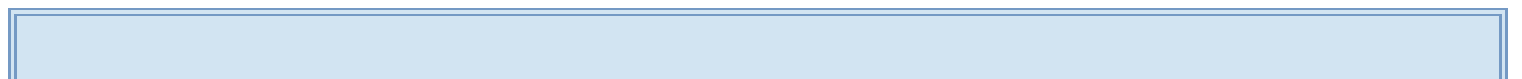
“Cough, Odd Winged Ravens’ dream won’t end in a place like this...!”

“Odd Winged Ravens?”

“T-That’s right. From this war, we will make the world know of our exist...”

“Ah, okay. Well, goodbye.”

I cut off her head with my spear. I just had to beat the Event Dungeon. I didn’t really care about the detailed lore. As if to prove she was a monster created by the dungeon, she became particles of light and scattered into the air.



[You obtained 2,000 gold.]

[You obtained Odd Winged Ravens' Journal.]

[You succeeded in sweeping the mastermind! Points will be added to your final clear score.]

I picked up my Black Earthen Spear as I spit on the ground. Nauseating things were nauseating no matter what I told myself.

“I feel disgusted.”

“That’s normal. They talked like humans too.”

“But they’re monsters, right?”

“Yes, they’re monsters. So don’t worry about it, son.”

I felt much better with father’s reassurance. Although I didn’t expect much from him before entering the dungeon, I was thankful now that he was here. He truly was reliable.

I didn’t say my thoughts out loud. Between a father and son, it wasn’t necessary.

I had also realized something important. Event Dungeons were

cleared when their boss monsters were killed. However, we received a message saying that points were added to our final clear score. In other words, the Event Dungeons' clearing process was also important.

I wondered if it would have been even higher if we went wild in the battlefield. However, I stopped thinking about it, as it was too late.

Instead, I opened Odd Winged Ravens' Journal. It showed how much they hated their countries, the things they had done and what they planned to do in the future. I skimmed through most of the information and looked for the part that helped explain the current situation. With luck, I thought I might find a way to further increase the final clear score.

Yes, it was there.

“There's only one thing left to do then. Huk!”

At the same time I tried to change the subject to alleviate the morbid mood, I turned my head to the battlefield and couldn't help but gasp seeing the zombies getting up one by one. Both armies had realized what was happening, but the number of zombies was increasing too quickly for them to properly respond. In the end, the commanding officers of both armies had led their soldiers into a night battle.

“Those bastards used black magic on our comrades in arm!”

“Kill them! Let our comrades rest in peace!”

“Guooooo!”

“Oh no, it’s too late.”

The magicians swept the zombies with a large-scale magic, and the foot soldiers began to fight afterwards. What were they thinking? Unless they were like me or father, they would become zombies the moment zombies even scratched them! The commanding generals who would send their soldiers out to battle in a situation like this couldn’t be sane.

It turned out, the commanding officers really weren’t sane.

After reading the journal a bit more, I found out that the black magicians had not used black magic on just the corpses. They had already made their moves on the commanding generals. Being able to affect the higher ups of both countries meant there were spies infiltrating both governments. Surprisingly, this Odd Winged Ravens might be a pretty large organization.

Of course, I didn’t really care about all this. I simply wondered if stopping their plans would net me more final clear score, but it seemed it was too late.

The soldiers were fighting each other, and zombies interrupted and bit them. Slowly, the number of zombies on the battlefield was growing. I trembled as I watched what was taking place on the

battlefield. What I was witnessing was surely worthy of making me feel fear. However, a fear-shattering voice then reached my ears.

“When is the giant zombie going to appear?”

“Father, I really respect this side of you.”

Father was stretching his legs like he was unhappy he missed the chance to fight the black magicians. He was almost like a puppy waiting for someone to say ‘catch!’ My tension died along with it.

“Wow, what are they, cockroaches? They sure are multiplying fast.”

“They’re seriously creepy. I feel like there are bugs crawling all over me.”

In the blink of an eye, the zombies were overwhelming the humans. The knights who knew how to wield mana and the magicians seemed to have noticed something was wrong, as they had long since escaped the battlefield or had returned to complain to the higher-ups. However, the zombies were rising from their camps as well.

Realizing that the commanding officers became zombies who could only make groaning noises, the knights and magicians blasted their mana and slaughtered the zombies. The problem was that there were just too many zombies. In the end, most of them ran away after realizing the situation they were in. Now, only

ordinary soldiers were left on the battlefield. They were simply food for the zombies. By now, there were more than 100,000 of them. When I was feeling nervous about the sheer number of zombies, father spoke up.

“Let’s see. Every two or so drop an average of 70 gold, so that’s 35 gold per zombie. Since there’s two of us, I divide that by two... which means 17 gold per zombie. So if I kill them all, that’s 1.7 million gold. That’s 340 million won! That’s an expensive necklace for wife and even solves Yua’s marriage fund. Ooooh, son! This place is a gold mine!”

“That’s what you’re thinking of in this situation, father!?”

I cancel what I said about him being reliable! This person didn’t have a moral dilemma in the first place!

## Chapter 52. Hermes (7)

---

We ran to the battlefield. Other than the black magicians we took care of, there didn't seem to be anyone hiding in the shadows. Although we ran into some of the knights escaping the battlefield, they became startled and ran away without talking to us.

[You obtained 80 gold.]

[You obtained 72 gold.]

“Mm, I really like the floors where zombies appear. There are more monsters than usual. Maybe I should grind a bit more on the 25th floor...”

While shouting things like ‘Yua’s education insurance...’ or ‘residential home loans...’ father sliced the zombies apart. It seemed he was planning on buying a building in Gangnam.

In any case, I also joined in. Even if there were 100,000 zombies, we were killing about 3 every second, meaning 360 zombies were disappearing every minute. I didn't exactly want to calculate how long it would take to kill all 100,000 zombies. I assumed it would take about 5 hours.

“Guooo.”

“Guo what!?”

“Guooo!”

“Like I said, guo what!?”

“Son, is your head okay?”

“This is just my habit. I can’t do much about it after all these years!”

I responded to each zombie as I crushed their heads. Father and son, a spearman duo drew a future of hopes and dreams as they slaughtered their way forward. They were terrifying even in my eyes. Then, I realized I was one of them and despaired.

“Peika!”

[Thunder Bomb!]

A spherical ball of lightning that Peika casually threw out exploded dozens of zombies in an instant. Taking care of the remaining zombies, we ran through the path Peika created. It was toward the direction of one of the camps of the warring countries. I wanted to look for any remaining members of those odd winged bastards just in case, and father was following me.

“Tempest!”



“Kyaaak!”

“Shockwave!”

“Kuaaa!”

Even our weakest skills could easily destroy the zombies, so it did not take long until we took care of all the zombies in the camp. I then went inside the camp’s largest tent, where I was able to find what I was looking for.

It seemed the black magicians never thought their journal would be stolen, as they had recorded everything they had done to both camps in their journal.

The commanding general of this camp apparently liked to drink red tea mixed with brandy. Thus, the spy they planted had gifted him a high-class brandy cursed with some black magic. Just by drinking it, the black magicians would be able to control him whenever they wanted. What I found was this cursed brandy.

[You retrieved an item of the Odd Winged Ravens. Points will be added to your final clear score.]

“Let’s go to the other camp as well!”

“You’re saying we should go through that battlefield infested with zombies?”

“Of course.”

We took about 30 minutes to slaughter our way through the battlefield. In the process, we had killed about 10,000 zombies. Just like in the other camp, we cleaned up the zombies in this camp and found the cursed item.

[You retrieved all of Odd Winged Ravens’ items. Points will be added to your final clear score.]

“Whew.”

Hm, what was this mysterious feeling of accomplishment? I was wiping sweat off my forehead like a farmer that had just finished harvesting all his crops. It was then that father let out an exclamation of surprise.

“Ohhh! Look at that, son!”

“Yes? Huk!”

In the middle of a hill that had become a battlefield for the zombies, something was rising. Just whose corpse was so big? Would the Titan from the myths even be that big? In front of our

eyes, a 7-meter-tall giant zombie was roaring.

[GUOOOOOO!]

[The boss monster of Giant Zombie's Attack, the Giant Zombie has appeared! Defeating it and clearing the dungeon will grant special rewards!]

When the Giant Zombie raised its huge arm and slammed down on the ground, the tremor even reached where father and I were. At the same time, the shockwave annihilated hundreds of zombies. I couldn't help but be touched by the sight.

“What an epic team kill...”

“Damn! Let's hurry, son. He's going to steal all the gold!”

“You're probably the only one who can say that after seeing what just happened, father.”

I was sad. I didn't like hunting monsters for the sole purpose of earning gold, but it was the opposite for father. I assumed that's why he so easily registered as an ability user. Although he had not started being active, with his awakened ability and fame as a martial artist, he would become well-known in no time.

[GUOOOOOO!]

“Uh, father, he’s looking this way.”

“Does he want to have a staring contest?”

[GUOO!]

“He’s picking up a few zombies.”

“Is he going to eat them?”

Wrong.

Instead of eating them, he threw them at us as if they were stones. With an incredible speed no less!

“Run, father!”

“That crazy bastard is literally throwing gold away!”

“Just dodge!”

[GUOOOOO!]

Father and I were now the only living humans in this battlefield. The Giant Zombie seemed to like living people more than dead

ones, as he ignored the zombies nearby and ran toward us. Thundering booms rang out as he took each step, and any zombies he grabbed on his way were thrown at us like stones. Then, in response to the Giant Zombie's attack, the tens of thousands of zombies left on the battlefield turned their attention toward us.

However, that was not what I paid attention to.

“Wow, look at all the team kills he's doing while running here.”

“Kuk, 2,100 gold just disappeared in his hands!”

Crack, crack! More zombies were crushed under the Giant Zombie's feet. No matter how slow it was, with its enormous size, almost a dozen zombies died every time it took a step. I instantly thought I could use the Giant Zombie to easily kill the zombies.

“Father, do you want to hunt the Giant Zombie and clear the Event Dungeon, or do you want to avoid it and hunt more zombies?”

“Of course, we have to hunt more zombies! 100,000 or 200,000, it makes no difference to me!”

“Alright, then I'll aggro the Giant Zombie. Father can go to the opposite side and hunt the normal zombies.”

“Got it.”

Father and I split up. After confirming that he was running to the camp on the opposite side of the battlefield, I shouted as I ran toward the Giant Zombie.

“I’m here, you idiot! How can you catch me with that slow body of yours!?”

[You used the skill, Provoke! You draw nearby enemies toward you!]

[GUOOOOOOO!]

Along with the zombies near me, the Giant Zombie fixed its eyes on me. After sweeping through the normal zombies with my Black Earthen Spear, I grinned.

“Hmph, you think that’s enough? To satisfy me, you’ll have to bring at least 3 times as many zombies!”

[You used the skill, Provoke! You draw nearby enemies toward you!]

[You mastered low-rank Provoke! Your words become more effective in drawing enemy’s hostility.]

[You learned mid-rank Provoke! You can let your voice reach an even broader area, drawing even more enemies toward you. It becomes easier to provoke enemies with high intelligence!]

‘Provoke became mid-rank!’

At the same time that Provoke’s rank went up, the hostility of zombies piercing into me became completely different than before. The Giant Zombie was also running towards me without a shred of hesitation. Tremors rang out for each step the Giant Zombie took, which was like a human being running in slow motion. With each tremor, more zombies were killed.

“Good, good, keep coming!”

I started walking leisurely. The ordinary zombies couldn’t even scratch me. When one of them stuck itself on me, I grabbed him and swung him around, sweeping away the incoming zombies. After a little while, the sky became darker, forcing me to look up. There, I saw the Giant Zombie looking down at me with its eyes full of maggots.

The dungeon’s genre was definitely horror. It was like seeing a 3D movie, but in real life, not in a theatre. The Giant Zombie was also much more intimidating up close.

That said, it was still a zombie!

“Catch me if you can!”

[GUOOOOOO!]

I know, I also wanted to do this with a cute girl, not some 7 meter tall giant zombie! But what other choice did I have? Father wanted to hunt more zombies, and I wanted to clean up this battlefield crawling with zombies. It was because I had a strong feeling that I would receive another bonus if I killed all the zombies.

Killing the Giant Zombie would be easy, but the Event Dungeon would end if we did. I suspected that father and I were the only ones who would refuse to clear an Event Dungeon for such a reason.

[GUOOOOOO!]

“If you want to complain, do it after you catch me! Tempest!”

I had no intention of letting him off of his crime of using humans (though they became zombies) as weapons. I used Tempest after Tempest, as I gulped down lowest-grade Mana Potions.

After running around like that for two hours, I became exhausted. I must have killed at least 10,000 zombies by now. When I looked from above to check the current state, the battlefield had become quite clean.

In the distance, I saw father gathering up and hunting zombies. I



turned around and saw that not many zombies remained in the path the Giant Zombie was taking to run. It seemed it was time to end this game of tag!

“Peika, take care of the zombies that are still alive.”

[I would need a lot of mana. Is that okay, Master?]

“Yeah, you can take it all.”

I gulped down a Double Mana Potion, which restored my MP by 2,000. It was worth 3 million won, so I couldn't help but shake my hands as I drank it.

From another perspective, it was only worth around 100 zombies! Since growing as a dungeon explorer, I thought I became quite generous. I finished the 3 million won potion in an instant. It tasted like orange juice.

[GUOOOO!]

At the same time, the Giant Zombie swept up the few dozen zombies that were left and put them in his mouth. It seemed he was also exhausted from chasing me around for so long. Once Peika began burning up the zombies, the Giant Zombie let out an angry growl and began looking for other zombies to eat. It was truly a stomach churning sight.

For some reason, however, something felt off with the scene of

the Giant Zombie eating the zombies. It didn't feel like something it did on impulse, but something that had been planned. Regardless, I took care of the zombies nearby quickly. The Giant Zombie tried to stomp on me in anger, but he was hopeless to catch me.

“Father, if you're done, come help me!”

“I'm already on my way!”

Father was running toward me while blasting away the few zombies that remained with his shockwaves. I was slightly astonished by how much his skill had grown. However, I became frozen soon after from the message I received.

[Subquest complete! You exterminated all the zombies in the dungeon. Giant zombie absorbed 5.8 percent of the dungeon's zombies.]

[With low zombie absorption, Giant Zombie fails to evolve into Giant Ghoul! Giant Zombie loses control and transforms into Flesh Golem.]

[Guooooo!]

“Wow.”

I let out a short exclamation of surprise. After it finished eating up the zombies in its vicinity, the Giant Zombie faced the sky and roared.

‘Ah, a rotten tooth is falling off.’ I quickly dodged, and the tooth crashed down with a boom, forming a crater.

‘Whew.’ I sighed internally as I realized I almost got crushed by a tooth. If Loretta asked how I died, I would have been too embarrassed to tell her.

In the next moment, the Giant Zombie’s other teeth fell off like raindrops. Not only that, its skin peeled off, its maggot-filled eyes, fingernails, and the few strands of hair all fell off. To me, there was no other disaster like it. Not only were they dirty, but if they were to hit me, I was sure I would take a huge amount of damage. I trembled and quickly escaped the premises.

[GUOOOOO!]

“Ah, I wish I could blur it out...”

[I’m back, Master! What’s next? That guy?]

“Yeah, I don’t want to be here anymore.”

I was tired and cold from the late-night game of tag with a Giant Zombie. Infusing Peika into the Black Earthen Spear, I glanced at the Giant Zombie that had turned into a Flesh Golem. The slight

resemblance to a human that it had before was now gone. Its outer skin had melted, revealing its veins and black rotten flesh. I felt an unprecedented appetite for destruction from its indescribably disgusting appearance.

[KUOOOOOO!]

However, it was fast and strong. With speed that made it hard to believe it was once the Giant Zombie, it struck the ground with its fist. At the same time, the earth trembled and I received damage. Kuk, it was the same as Lizard Knight's earthquake attack! With that in mind, I flew up. However, the other dungeon explorer here, my father, had a different reaction.

“Shock Absorption, Shock Reflection!”

“The hell is that!? So cool!”

Father stood his ground and received the Flesh Golem's attack. Then, he thrust his spear forward, shooting out a shockwave that was on a completely different level from his usual shockwaves. The shockwave flew forward and struck the Flesh Golem's arm. Although it looked cool in a way, I couldn't help but frown at the sight of Flesh Golem's flesh exploding out and scattering about everywhere.

[KUOOOOOO!]

“I'm coming too!”

If I simply stood still, father would rack up contribution points. I couldn't let that happen. Resolved, I charged at the Flesh Golem with my lightning clad Black Earthen Spear. When it tried to lift the arm that had a huge crater from father's attack, I jumped above its forearm and shouted.

“Talaria!”

## Chapter 53. Hermes (8)

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[You summoned Talaria. For the next 10 minutes, you can freely fly or walk on air. If flying, you will receive an additional 100 percent increase to your movement speed. Remaining time: 09:59:99]

My boots let out a radiant white light for an instant. When it dissipated, small wings were attached to my boots. I kicked the air and shot up. From below, father's shout reached me.

“Woah, that's super cool! Give me one too!”

I ignored him and shot up further. Of course, since the Flesh Golem was only 7 meters tall, I only needed to shoot up by one more kick. My eyes were now in line with the Flesh Golem's melting head. Startled, it raised its arm, but my Heroic Strike was faster.

“DIE! Heroic Strike!”

The Black Earthen Spear left my hand and flew towards him like an arrow. Like lightning, it was radiating a brilliant light. Even if the boss monster was now a Flesh Golem, it could not dodge Heroic Strike, which even the fast ghouls could not avoid.

[GUOOOOOO!]

The moment my Black Earthen Spear penetrated the Flesh Golem's head, it exploded out, scattering its bones, flesh, and blood in all directions. I hurriedly flew up and maintained my balance. As it was my first time using Talaria, I couldn't stop myself from staggering when doing the same movements I was used to doing.

[K-Kuooooo!]

“Huu, as I thought, you won't die from just that.”

How great would it have been if a single Heroic Strike was enough to kill it? Even with its exploded head, the Flesh Golem seemed perfectly fine, as it tried to capture me with its two arms. Of course, with me flying in the air, there was no chance for it to succeed.

“Father, it looks like we need to pummel him after we make him fall!”

“Yeah, I'm starting!”

After telling father my plan, I took out my Silver Spear and shot Tempest out toward its arms. Every time the small storm of mana struck, its flesh exploded out, causing it to stagger. Annoyed, it went wild trying to catch me. It even shot pieces of its body at me! I had to work diligently to dodge the flying lumps of flesh.

“Dirty! So dirty!”

[Master, calm down.]

I shouldn't have come into an Event Dungeon like this! Regretting my actions, I continued to attack. While the Flesh Golem was completely focused on me, father used his skill.

“Take this! I call it the Wave Web Shock!”

“Web?”

When I looked down, something was tying down its two thick legs. Curious, I examined what it was and realized it was silk. Silk threads to be exact. It was connected to the bracelet father had on his wrist.

“Is that...?”

[KUAAAAA!]

The moment father flexed his arm, the silk threads tied to the Flesh Golem's legs reverberated violently. The next moment, I was utterly shocked. His thick legs had been severed! I understood that father transmitted shockwaves through the silk threads, but I didn't understand why it was so strong.

The Flesh Golem was just as shocked as it let out a flustered roar



and fell backwards. When its huge body hit the ground, a booming sound rang out. Watching this happen as I floated midair, I loudly shouted.

“That’s a cheat, father!”

“It goes really well with my ability, doesn’t it!?”

Damn, that was even more powerful than the spider webs Arachne shot out! I should’ve picked that! The Black Earthen Spear I loved so much suddenly felt like a mortal enemy. However, I knew my priorities. I had to take care of the Flesh Golem first. With that, I hurriedly landed and picked up the Black Earthen Spear that had fallen on the ground. Seeing Talaria, father’s eyes sparkled.

“Son, do you really not have another one? The winged boots.”

“How can there be another one of something so rare? What about you, father? How about gifting that accessory to your precious son?”

“I’ll trade it for the winged boots.”

If he wasn’t my father, I would have thrown ramen in his face. How unfortunate.

“Let’s just hurry and wrap this up.”

“It was my dream to fly when I was young... How cheap, son.”

My dream is to not be involved with you! I’d believe you more if you said your dream was to shoot down a flying pterodactyl with your spear!

[You defeated the Event Dungeon boss monster, Flesh Golem!]

[50,000 gold is distributed evenly among participants. You obtained 25,000 gold.]

After losing its legs, the Flesh Golem struggled, trying to regenerate them, but father and I didn’t let that happen. In the end, it was burned, exploded, sliced, or stabbed until it was finally dead. The dungeon determined that father had the highest contribution. I suspected cutting its legs off was what did it.

This was the first time anyone had stolen the first place in contribution from me. Of course, that time when I watched over Ren soloing the Lizard Knight didn’t count.

In any case, not knowing the full list of rewards didn’t feel so bad. It gave a refreshing feeling of anticipation. What would come about? Since we completed a subquest, maybe a really good accessory would come out.

While I was eagerly waiting in anticipation, father spoke.

“Hm, son, between a finger and a toe, what do you want?”

“Neither! Don’t tell me that’s what we got!? Even though we cleared that subquest? Father, answer me!”

“Alright, I’ll take the toe then.”

“Father!”

[Choose your reward.]

[1. Flesh Golem’s second finger.]

“Damn it!”

I was curious which toe father got, but that wasn’t important right now. Still unable to believe that this was the reward, I picked the finger with an empty smile on my face.

I mean, what was the point of killing the black magicians, collecting the cursed items, and eradicating the zombies? Don’t tell me we would have gotten something else if we didn’t clear the subquest?

However, when the item appeared, my puffed-up cheeks simmered down. It was called finger, but it was really a black metallic ring that gave off a slightly eerie aura. Mm, my Spirit of the Collector worked! Feeling relieved, I checked the item description.

[Flesh Golem's Second Finger (Unique)

Durability – 60/60

Equipment Limit – One who defeated the Flesh Golem

Option – Strength +7, Constitution +7

Skill – Regeneration: Usable once per week. Completely regenerates all damaged areas.]

“Nice, good options.”

In truth, the words ‘damaged areas’ were a little vague. For dungeon explorers, if they were involved in battles where their limbs were cut off, they would die. It was because no matter how much one limb was focused, it would not get severed unless the explorer's HP was extremely low. That said, it was a bit different in the outside world. It seemed the ring would be perfect for when my limbs were damaged outside the dungeon. It would become a reliable insurance of sorts.

Even without the regenerative ability, the ring was excellent. 7 strength and 7 constitution. That was almost 3 levels worth of stat bonuses! I was happy at the unexpected fortune.

“What about you, fath... Huk!”

“Like I said, it’s a toe.”

Father took out Flesh Golem’s Gigantic Toe from his inventory and looked at me. It really was a toe!

“Apparently it’s an install weapon. I can apparently install it near allies to raise their overall stats by 2 percent.”

“That’s a very subtle amount.”

“I can also install it near enemies and make it explode. It says it does great damage.”

“That’s a one-time use item, then!”

If father had been the one to pick the finger, that toe would’ve been mine! I thanked my luck. Now that I thought about it, the Black Earthen Spear and this ring too... The items I needed seemed to be falling into my possession. Perhaps it was thanks to Skill Collector’s passive skill, Spirit of the Collector.

“Son, let’s switch.”

“What’s done is done, father.”

[You cleared the Event Dungeon and gained 1 bonus stat point]

[You will now return.]

Right before we were about to start a deathmatch over our rewards, the scenery warped. We found ourselves back in the First Dungeon. A raid boss had not appeared again. I couldn’t hide my disappointment, but I decided not to worry about it since I had already gotten great rewards.

“If you don’t want to switch, just take it, son.”

“NO! This toe is creepy as hell!”

However, father threw the toe at me, left the party, and returned to the dungeon he came from. Left alone in front of the 25th floor door, I stood blankly with the Flesh Golem’s toe.

“Ah... Should I just give this to Ellos?”

It was the start of First Dungeon’s version of a chain letter.

The next day was the 9th manifestation of Peruta. Deific Manifestation originally had a cooldown of one month. With a day taken away, it was now 29 days. That said, it did not mean I had to wait 29 days before I could use Deific Manifestation again. I didn't know whether it was because of some flow of mana or period of the moon, but I assumed there was something complicated involved that I didn't quite understand. In any case, if I used Deific Manifestation in a set period of time, I could use it again the next day if a new period began.

Simply put, I could 'save' Deific Manifestation in case a dangerous situation occurred, and use it on the 29th day if nothing happened.

And of course, nothing dangerous had ever happened to me. Inside the dungeon, yes, but dying in the dungeon did not hurt even a single strand of my hair. As such, I never called Peruta for situations that occurred in the dungeon. Peruta seemed to dislike it, but I didn't want to concede when it came to this. I was climbing the dungeon to increase my strength. I believed that if I relied on Peruta as an insurance, I could not really grow.

Only, there was no next time if I died on Earth. That was why I saved Deific Manifestation. No matter how much stronger I wanted to get, it would be the end if I died. So I spent 28 days doing my own thing, and always called Peruta on the 29th day.

[Have you been well?]

“Yes, Peruta. How about you?”

[It’s dark where I am. I’m always silently meditating by myself.]

Because we were both talking from my mouth, anyone watching would feel weirded out. Although I had control over my body right now, I could hand it over to Peruta at any time. Now, both my mana and constitution were much higher than when we first met. I could stay in this state for up to 10 minutes.

“You see, I obtained Hermes’ true name this time around.”

[A god? It’s a name I haven’t heard of, but I can feel its holiness. So you’ve already obtained a god’s true name. As expected of my disciple.]

“Ahaha, thank you.”

[But don’t be conceited just because you obtained its power. Don’t forget, the foundation of your strength lies in Peruta Circuit and spearmanship. ... What’s their level?]

“Peruta Circuit is level 4, high-rank Spear Technique is still level 4.”

Peruta rubbed his chin. It felt a bit weird.

[As I thought, the problem is that you don’t have suitable



opponents. I've asked others, but it seemed most dungeon explorers started learning high-rank techniques after the 50th floor. After all, there's a limit to how high you can raise your skill alone. You could only raise yours so high because of how noble your spear technique is.]

“Yes, so take good care of me today as well.”

With that I closed my eyes, giving Peruta full control of my body.

“Then, let's start. Imagine World.”

Someone else listening on might think I had some 8th grade syndrome, but it was the only magic Peruta could use when he was manifested in me. Perhaps it was a skill that came with Deific Manifestation itself.

The moment Peruta said ‘Imagine World’, he and I were facing each other. We looked exactly alike.

“I don't have much time, so I'll hurry.”

“Yes, thanks for the lesson!”

This, of course, wasn't the real me or the real Peruta. The real me was sitting cross-legged on the ground with closed eyes. I was in an illusory, dream-like world. I had heard I could enter this state freely if I reached the apex of self-introspection.

Of course, I had no idea what to do to reach this state. All I was doing now was learning a spear technique from a spearman much stronger than myself. Every time we battled, I could feel my skill proficiency shooting up. As such, I couldn't help but be engrossed in the situation.

“I'm starting then.”

With a short sentence, Peruta approached me. His spear reached for my forehead as if it was moving freely. I didn't know when he had thrust, nor when it would hit me. I hurriedly brought my spear forward and focused on blocking his attack.

“Your reaction speed is faster.”

“It's thanks to Hermes... Haat!”

Even as he complimented me, Peruta made his spear much faster. Shoot, Hermes applied to him as well! Because I had shown him first hand the growth of my body, he had quickly adapted.

“You won't win by avoiding alone!”

“Hap!”

His spear seemed fast, yet not fast, and strong, yet not strong. That was why it was so scary. Before I even noticed, I felt like it

would take my head or heart. Not to mention, when he started using mana, each and every attack would contain an aura of Tempest. It made sense, as Peruta Circuit was a cultivation method that focused on bringing forth a strong rotational force.

What was scary was that Peruta's spear did not even shake as it carried all that energy. Since he possessed destructive power and that degree of precision, his attacks could only be strong. Against him, my spear technique only looked like a forced attempt to stab and slice.

“I’m still trying my best!”

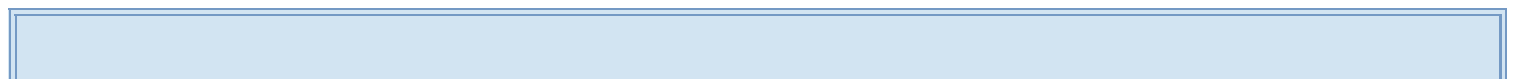
“Good, I like that spirit!”

Peruta easily dodged the spear I sent forward with all my strength, using his spear to tap on my spear. I almost knelt from the sudden force of pressure, but I clenched my teeth and continued charging forward.

“Haaaaap!”

“You’re welcome to come any time!”

Because I knew the difference in our strength, I acted as wildly as I wanted. I knew Peruta would be the only one in this world who could receive my spear without even changing his expression!



[High-rank Spear Technique became level 5! External mana will naturally flow into your attacks without use of own mana, making it stronger. You are walking towards the peak of spearmanship. More force is added to your thrusts.]

“Let’s stop here.”

“Huu... Okay.”

The moment Peruta gave the signal, I closed my eyes and opened them again. The familiar sight of dungeon walls greeted me. However, Deific Manifestation had not ended yet. There was still a minute left.

[You became even more skilled.]

“Hearing that from Peruta doesn’t really cheer me up.”

Although we spent about 90 minutes in the Imagine World, only 9 minutes had passed in reality. During that time, he and I had exchanged a countless number of spears. Of course, it was my complete loss. Although we were using the same body, he was always the one who won. It showed how important the depth of a skill was.

With father and Peruta around, I couldn’t stay conceited even if I wanted to.

[I'm not trying to brag, but my spear technique had once reached the peak. Being able to exchange spears with me proves your peerless talent. Keep devoting yourself to cultivating your techniques. Time will build up and become your strength.]

“Yes. ... Peruta Circuit level 7, high-rank Spear Technique master, right?”

“Huhu, keep working hard. Today was fun, too.”

With that, Peruta disappeared. Left alone, I closed my eyes and remembered the 90 minutes of battle I just experienced.

“High-rank Spear Technique master... that's quite a demanding task. However.”

With today's level up, there were only 5 levels to go. In just 5 levels, I could directly inherit his skills. Of course, skills became harder to level up the higher they were.

Although it seemed far away now, I would eventually reach it. I was confident. I had never stopped. I always stepped forward, staring straight onward. That much, I was sure of.

I stood up with my spear. The spear technique I saw and experienced. It was time to review it.

# Chapter 54. What It Means To Climb The First Dungeon (1)

---

How much time passed? When I noticed Ellos' message that he arrived in front of the door, I was dripping with sweat.

[Thanks for waiting, friend.]

“Nah, I didn't wait that long.”

[I'll make a party right away.]

When I found the party Ellos made and tapped it with my finger, the scenery warped. In front of me was Ellos, who I now saw for the first time in 4 years.

“Ellos!”

“... Who are you?”

Ellos had grown a lot since the last time we met. His slightly frail body now had muscles, and his pretty boy face was a lot manlier. If I were to bring him to Earth, he could even debut as an actor straight away.

However, Ellos was tilting his head as he was staring at me.

“Sorry, but this party is already full. Can you look for another...?”

“I’m Kang Shin. What are you saying?”

“Hahaha, you kid... Eh, you have the same voice!”

Ellos’ expression went stiff. The shield warrior behind him, who I believed was named Paul, stepped forward.

“No way, the monster from back then became this handsome? What did you pick up and eat?”

“Well I did technically pick and eat things, but...”

Handsome? He was flattering me too much. It was simply a monster becoming human again. Taking out Flesh Golem’s Giant Toe from my inventory, I placed it in Ellos’ hand and said, “Here’s a reunion gift, Ellos.”

“Eck? What’s this, a toe? Eh, an install item? How creepy!”

I got the reaction I wanted and was satisfied. I then looked at Ellos’ companions. There was Paul who I met on the 5th floor and a woman I had not seen before. If my memory served correctly, there should a man named Celtine... Eh? He wasn’t here?

“What happened to Celtine?”

“He died. It was a heroic death in battle against dozens of invaders.”

“ ... ”

Ellos’ calm expression while talking about the death of his comrade gave me chills. Ellos then showed a bitter smile and tapped my shoulder lightly.

“Don’t worry about it. The moment we became warriors, we prepared ourselves for death. He used his life to protect everyone. Even though he’s no longer here, he lives on in our hearts. I decided to honor his death by chasing the invaders away from our continent.”

“If you’re okay with it, I won’t say anything.”

“Yeah, thanks. Anyways, it’s great meeting you again, Shin. The aura coming off of you surprised me. I had heard the rumors, but you really were a Hero.”

“Sorry, but I don’t really know about that Hero thing, though I’ve heard it a lot.”

I proceeded to shake hands with Paul, then faced the woman standing behind Ellos. It was my first time meeting her. She was a beautiful woman with deep-violet hair which was tied down, and a pair of calm eyes matching her hair’s color. She wore light clothing



that made it easy to move, had a large bow in one hand, and wore a quiver on her back. Strangely, a silver ring on her ring finger stood out.

I looked at Ellos. He was also wearing a ring on his ring finger.

“So this is your fiancée!”

“Oh, you’re unexpectedly not dense. Right, this is my fiancée, Baruela Atuna. Isn’t she pretty?”

“Hello, I’m Baruela Atuna. I’ve heard a lot about you from Ellos.”

Baruela put her free hand (sorry, but it looked frail) on her chest and lightly bowed. At her formal greeting, I couldn’t help but return the same greeting.

“We’re both from the Resistance Army.”

“Well done, Ellos. You managed to snatch up a beauty like her...”

At my words, Ellos made a dumbfounded expression.

“You’re one to talk. You have the undivided attention of the crown princess, who’s famous even throughout the First Dungeon.”

“If you’re talking about Palludia, I can only be disappointed in your eye for people...”

At that moment, an area became warped and four dungeon explorers appeared. Ah, two of them were faces I’d seen before. One was the long-eared woman, who I now knew to be an elf, carrying a bow and quiver like Baruela, and the other was the rapier warrior woman who said I had a cute face. Even after all these years, the two of them had the same faces. I knew elves lived for a long time and aged late, but I was shocked the rapier warrior didn’t change at all.

However, I had never seen the other two before. They were both extremely beautiful. One of them had a shield long enough to cover her body entirely, and was about 175 cm.

She had pink hair that curled down her shoulders, and had moist, pink eyes that were strangely charming. However, the way she held her shield or the way she trembled like a baby deer unlike how mature she looked, both looked somewhat familiar.

Where did I see her before...? Ah!

“Ah, it’s Miss Shuna! You became so pretty!”

“H-Hello, Crown Prince-nim! I-It’s an honor. Crown Prince-nim is really handsome too. ... Uuu, what do I do, I talked to him. Ludia, I talked to Crown Prince-nim!”

“Why do you only recognize Shuna!? I’m the one you have friended!”

When I was exchanging greetings with Shuna, Palludia, who was standing next to her, hit me. Because it was within my expectations, I blocked her with my arm. Seeing Palludia rolling on the ground in pain, I felt very satisfied.

Although I didn’t recognize them, I realized who they were when I saw the other two. If four people from Luka continent were here, Palludia and Shuna would naturally be among them. I was simply embarrassed to face her. That’s why I acted that way.

Palludia got up, holding back her teary eyes. She was vastly different than before. 4 years ago, she was a little kid who had not even been 140 cm, but she had now become a fairly tall, 170 cm lady.

Her once child-like, twintailed blonde hair was now flowing down to her waistline, glistening a lustrous gold. Her sapphire eyes were deep, like they contained countless years. Furthermore, her white skin looked smooth enough that water droplets could flow down seamlessly. She had a not too large and not too small nose, which a sculptor seemed to have devoted his heart and soul to creating. Finally, her moist lips glowed with a peach-like light pink.

Her appearance was terrifyingly beautiful, to the point that it seemed to suck in anyone that laid their eyes on her. It was the type of peerless beauty that I never would have imagined myself seeing. If anyone with a weak heart was watching, his heart would

undoubtedly stop at this breathtaking beauty. Just what did she eat for 4 years to grow so much? I couldn't believe my eyes.

Wait, no. I remembered Shina saying that people from Luka continent had a sudden growth spurt. Although I had not paid much attention to it before, Shuna and Palludia were both from the Luka continent. I couldn't believe my stupidity. So that's why Palludia was saying she wasn't a little kid.

That said, it was slightly iffy to say she was fully grown. As her robe that stuck to her figure showed, her chest area was more or less the same. Had they not fully grown yet? Or was that how they were when they were fully grown? If I were to make a hasty judgement, she was like Yua!

Of course, even without much of a chest, her slender arms and legs, and elegant curves made her figure extremely charming. However, I did not say any of this out loud.

“Ahahaha, you grew a lot. In height.”

“Why is that the first thing you say, you O... Or... Orc?”

Although her beauty made it hard for me to stare at her, I remembered the Palludia from 4 years ago and barely met her eyes. At the same time, Palludia, who was looking at me from head to toe, made a blank expression.

“Y-You, are you really Orc?”

“No, I’m not Orc, but I am Kang Shin. You still say rude things so easily.”

“... I-It really is you.”

Palludia was frozen in place like she was hit by an ice magic. For some reason, Shuna, who was standing next to her, kept covering her face with her shield. I turned to face the rapier warrior, and asked.

“Did they eat something strange while growing up?”

“Ahaha, Crown Prince-ssi is the bad one. I heard stories, but what happened to turn you into such a... Mm, how fine. My eyes weren’t wrong. Wow, look at this toned chest.”

“Um, can you not approach me? Also, please stop touching me like that.”

When I asked her as I slowly backed away, the elf archer pulled the rapier warrior by her ears and pulled her away. As I thought, all elves except Loretta knew manners!

“W-Wait. Don’t you have anything else to say? To me!?”

After finally snapping out of her frozen state, Palludia asked me. It seemed she only grew up in appearance, as her way of talking

had not changed in the slightest. If she didn't open her mouth, she really was like a princess from a fairy tale. How unfortunate.

Looking at her, I tilted my head.

“Mm... Like what?”

“A-A lot! Like how much you wanted to see me, or how much prettier I became!”

“Mm? Well, I did wonder how you were doing occasionally, and I do think you became really pretty. But what about it?”

“...”

Palludia became silent. Her face was bright red to the point I was afraid it would blow up. What should I do about this awkward atmosphere? Did I do something to irritate Palludia again?

Then, I suddenly remembered. The Headband of Wisdom I got from the 19th floor's named lizardwoman! I had planned to give it to Palludia. Hoping it would ease her anger, I took out the Headband of Wisdom from my inventory. When she saw it, her eyes became wide as she asked.

“W-What's this?”

“An accessory. I happened to pick it up. I thought it'd suit you

well. It's a gift. You know, a reunion gift."

"G-Gift?"

Palludia's face became redder than the Headband of Wisdom. Did I do something wrong again!? Did she hate headbands? I thought it was perfect for her class, since it raised magic and intelligence. I didn't understand where I went wrong.

Even so, when I put the headband in her hand, she calmly took it and slowly put it in her hair. Mm, it seemed she didn't hate it that much. When I smiled with satisfaction, Palludia covered her face with her hands.

"Uuu, y-you're just, Orc...!"

"Ellos, he..."

"Don't say it, Paul. Don't say it..."

Eh...? This was different from the reunion I imagined... Looking at Ellos and Paul shaking their heads as they looked at me and silent Palludia, who was still looking down while covering up her bright red face, my mind fell into chaos. This, did I need to use Orc Lord's Warcry? Seeing that Baruela-ssi seemed fine, I went and talked to her. She simply covered her mouth with her hand as she snickered. After hearing what I said, the other party members looked at me with cold eyes and each said a word.

“Fool.”

“Idiot.”

“Crown Prince-nim is stupid.”

“Uuuu... you stupid Orc.”

‘Hey, I’m not stupid anymore! My intelligence is above 20 now! I’m not an orc either!’ Unable to figure out just what I did wrong, my mind fell into chaos yet again.

Edias continent, Luka continent, and two more from Pilos continent. A total of 10 people including myself stood in front of the 25th floor’s door. Other than Baruela, who replaced Celtine, all 9 members were the same as 4 years ago. It didn’t feel different in particular. Ellos seemed to have thought the same thing, as he only made a short speech as the party leader.

“Don’t think it will be as easy as it was 4 years ago. I’m sure you’ve all had your fair share of experiences as you climbed to the 25th floor, but Floor Master battles only get harder. This was especially true for the 20th Floor Master, Lizard Knight. However, I believe that with the members present, it is fully possible to defeat the Floor Master within 5 tries.”

He was blabbering some weird things.

“Five tries? Wouldn’t it be hard to succeed in five tries even if we



know the strategy beforehand?”

An axe carrying warrior from Pilos continent said with a bitter smile. Although he wasn't that close to me, it seemed the two people from Pilos continent kept in touch with Ellos. It was why they could meet us here today. However, he was blabbering even weirder things.

“Haha, but this time, we have Crown Prince!”

“Ah, right, Crown Prince.”

“If we clear it within five tries, we can really jump ahead of others.”

“Huhu, we are so bad ourselves.”

The other party members began blabbering. Everyone was only saying things with an overwhelming sense of defeat. I thought this was a dream team of sorts, but what was this feeling of helplessness!?

“Ellos, is the 25th Floor Master hard?”

“I hear it's a Giant Ghoul.”

“So this is where he appears!”

Was he trying to vent his anger for being unable to appear in the Event Dungeon? At my shout, the other party members tilted their heads. I figured I would only receive looks of envy if I told them about the Event Dungeon, so I didn't.

“As you can expect from what you've been experiencing since the 21st floor, tons of zombies are said to appear. Since Miss Palludia, Mitarus' priestess, is here, we won't have to worry about being infected, but be sure to have Holy Waters handy in case something goes wrong. Also, the zombies are known to act without set patterns so always stay on your guard and help each other out. Paul, Miss Shuna, can I trust you two to tank the Giant Ghoul?”

“Leave it to me!”

“Yes, blocking is one thing I'm confident in!”

I didn't know about Paul, but seeing Shuna, who was an untrustworthy little girl just 4 years ago, now nodding her head confidently with her slender figure and curly pink hair, I did feel rather touched. However, her eyes still had a hint of uncertainty... Ah. When she met my eyes, her face became red, and she dropped her head. It was rather hurtful.

I thought I wasn't ugly enough to hurt anyone watching anymore... What was it? My face? But mother said my face took after hers and was very handsome...

“Shin, you.”

“I’ll take care of the minions. I don’t need support so you guys can focus on the Giant Ghoul.”

“H-How reassuring.”

Ellos seemed a bit taken back by my confident speech. Everyone else showed signs of anxiety, but Palludia was silent unlike herself 4 years ago. Rather than having no complaints, it seemed she respected the name I had built up.

“There must be a reason you’re called Crown Prince. You better do your job properly.”

“You better heal people properly too.”

“Hmph! I’ll be focusing on the tanks, so don’t you get hurt while you’re distracted!”

“Miss Palludia, how cute. Huhu.”

“I agree. How cute. Kuku.”

“W-What! Why is everyone snickering!? Look away!”

Just what was cute about Palludia there? I could only see her acting grumpy... These guys, as I thought, they’re all weird!

“Today, we’ll focus on getting used to the Giant Ghoul’s habits and skills. We want to avoid dying without any gains. Let’s do our best. I believe in everyone’s ability that helped us climb to the 25th floor.”

With that, Ellos looked at me. In response, I confidently nodded my head. I mean, I could kill it alone, so why wouldn’t I be able to kill it with 9 other people?

“Then, let’s go in!”

Ellos opened the door to the Floor Master. What greeted us was a large graveyard.

## Chapter 55. What It Means To Climb The First Dungeon (2)

---

“Kuk, I heard Fields get created from the 25th floor onward. It was true...!”

“Field?”

“I’m talking about that graveyard! It’s the optimal environment to power up undead monsters.”

The instant the words left Ellos’ mouth, dozens of hands began to pop up across the graveyard. These guys had clearly seen some horror movies before. Palludia didn’t seem to want to let it happen, as she took in a deep breath and yelled.

“O Mitarus of justice and love, shine out with holy brilliance in this evil place!”

The image of her holding her staff and chanting with her silvery voice complimented her appearance, making her look even more beautiful. As I was thinking this, the graveyard, which was darker than usual boss rooms, possibly from the effect of the so-called field, became brighter. The majority of the zombies popping up from the ground screamed like vampires that just saw sunlight and returned to the ground. Palludia looked at me and shrugged her shoulders.

“Huhu, how was it?”

“Mm, I don’t know how to describe it, but it was cool.”

“Uu, Uung...”

Palludia flinched at my compliment. Wasn’t that what she expected? Girls were really complicated...

“The Giant Ghoul is appearing! Paul, Miss Shuna, please!”

“We’re going!”

“Y-Yes!”

Palludia and the other magicians struggled to keep up with the dozens of zombies popping out of the ground like daisies, while a gurgling roar rang out from deep inside the graveyard. I first called Peika.

“Peika, we’re going to take care of all the zombies. Can you do it?”

[Leave it to me, Master! ... I’m going to need a little mana, is that okay?]

“Take it!”

[Okay, Chain Lightning!]

Immediately afterwards, Peika's body shone and a nearby zombie was swept up in lightning. The lightning then bounced to another zombie near it, then bounced again to other zombies in its surroundings. Strangely, although the lightning was changing its target continuously, it was not losing energy, but gaining it.

The chain of lightning continued endlessly. It finished off each zombie in just a few seconds and bounced to the next one, expanding further outward. It was like a huge net had been cast over the graveyard. It went without saying that it caught the party members' attention.

“W-What's this!?”

“Is it lightning magic? But we don't have a lightning magician in our party!”

“No, this is elemental magic. Crown Prince-nim has a lightning elemental.”

Oh right, the archer from Luka continent was an elf. When I glanced at her, she gave me a courteous bow in return. Eh, wasn't she acting differently than before? She was courteous before, but I could feel awe and respect from her this time.

[Master, this won't harm allies!]

“Allies won’t be harmed, so charge at the ghoul!”

“Ah, everyone, the zombies’ feet are tied. Now is our chance!”

At my shout, Ellos directed the party members. Paul and Shuna were already heading towards the ghoul with their shields. Ellos and the other damage dealers followed soon after. The Giant Ghoul that was slowly making his appearance seemed to have become angry at his minions being slaughtered, as he let out another roar and fully revealed himself.

Unlike the zombies, he had an entirely hardened body. His steel claws shone with a malicious gleam, and his two large eyes showed clear hostility. Slightly over 4 meters tall, the Giant Ghoul came off as incredibly intimidating. In truth, I only remembered ghouls as being frail crybabies. I hoped the Floor Master Giant Ghoul would be a bit different.

“E-Eit! You stupid monster, come attack me!”

It wasn’t a line from a cartoon for little kids. It was Shuna using Provoke.

“Eit, Eit!” The sight of Shuna pushing on the Giant Ghoul’s legs with her large shield was slightly mismatched with her mature appearance. It was cute. However, the Giant Ghoul seemed to have thought differently, as he lifted his leg and tried to stomp on Shuna. In that instant, Shuna’s eyes sparkled as she tilted her shield slightly. It looked like she had her own way of dealing with it.



I then turned to face the zombies. Peika's lightning net had already killed several hundred of them, but more were coming out.

[Master, these guys keep popping up! I'm annoyed!]

"They're really like cockroaches. Let's split the work, Peika. You protect the long-ranged damage dealers and healers."

I playfully spun the spear in my hand twice, then aimed it forward.

"I'll protect the guys facing the ghoul. Tempest!"

"Kuooooo!"

"Crown Prince-nim, do you not need any assistance?"

After I had turned dozens of zombies into pieces of flesh, the elf archer asked me respectfully. Behind her, Baruela was also looking at me. I also saw Palludia glancing at me. You focus on healing Miss Shuna!

I took out a low-grade Mana Potion and put it in my mouth.

"You can focus on the Giant Ghoul. Peika will protect you perfectly, and I won't let the zombies near the other party members."

“I understand.”

After asking Peika to protect them, I shot forward. Seeing the newly popped up zombies heading toward the damage dealers and tanks, I shouted.

“You half-rotten corpse bastards, come fight me!”

[You used Provoke. You draw nearby enemies toward you.]

“Guooooo...”

“Human, arrogant, human...”

“Guooooo...”

“Living, human...”

My mid-rank Provoke succeeded in drawing the zombies' attention instantly. These cockroaches were crawling out of the ground even now. Letting out a deep breath, I charged straight forward.

“Haaaaap!”

The zombies that collided with my spear and armor exploded and flew back. The unintelligent zombies continued to flock to me like moths to a flame, and subsequently were blasted into pieces. After I cleared the zombies in a straight line to the Giant Ghoul, the number of zombies seemed a lot lower.

“Amazing. It’s not just his elemental...”

“Crown Prince... So that’s why they call him Crown Prince.”

“... O Mitarus!”

The two archers were talking about me instead of shooting out their arrows, but when Palludia chanted her spell, they snapped out of it and began attacking the Giant Ghoul. Of course, I didn’t really mind no matter what they did.

“The Giant Ghoul is attacking with his claws!”

I heard Ellos’ voice echo across the graveyard. At the same time, an air-severing swoosh rang out. When I turned to face the direction it was coming from, the Giant Ghoul was swiping in a cross with both his arms. Poison seeped out from the tips of his claws and tried to envelope the party members. With shocked expressions, they quickly ran around to dodge it.

“Nice, we dodged it!”

Hey, don't be so proud after dodging such an easy attack! Ah, a follow up!

“PAUL!”

“Cough, I'll be going first.”

Saying the same thing he said 4 years ago, Paul disappeared. He was the first to die 4 years ago, too! What was this feeling of deja vu? That guy, wasn't he just weak? How could a tank be so slow? Also, why be a tank if you're going to die in one hit!? Countless questions and annoyed screams resounded in my mind.

“Miss Shuna, will you be fine on your own?”

“Don't... kyak, worry!”

Although the scream worried me, Shuna was holding her ground, possibly thanks to that blessing by her family's guardian god. Since I couldn't run to help her at the moment, I set my worries aside. I decided to first focus on taking care of all the zombies.

“Ah, I'm using a lot of potions today.”

That said, the 300 gold Double Potions were truly delicious. While I was at it, I put one hand on my waist and made a refreshing expression like I was filming a sports drink ad. While I was having my fun, the nearby zombies jumped at me with their claws and teeth. The result was as expected. Their claws and teeth

shattered without even leaving a scratch on me.

Even so, I couldn't just forgive the perverted zombies for trying to bite my neck. I kicked the zombies here and there. Even my kicks could instantly kill these weaklings.

“Eh, was Crown Prince-nim a tank?”

“He's so strong.”

“He can fill all roles and even wields an elemental. He really is...”

[It's because he's my Master! Isn't he cool? Isn't he awesome!?!]

Peika had joined the party members before I noticed and was bragging about me. There was no problem since she turned the zombies around them into ashes, but it was embarrassing, so I hoped she'd stop.

“O benign Mitarus, become one with my allies!”

Palludia's holy chants were especially effective against undead monsters, and had the effect of weakening them. More importantly, it healed Shuna, who was blocking the Giant Ghoul's attacks with difficulty, and even recovered her stamina.

“Thanks, Ludia!”

“Focus on your opponent! Reinforcements are coming!”

“Warriors, attack! The ghoul’s attacks are blocked. Now’s our chance!”

“Kuooooooooo!”

Being in a party raid felt refreshing. Warriors shouted, healers chanted, and party leaders endlessly gave orders. I even felt a bit nostalgic as I remembered our raid from the 5th floor.

Of course, that was the past, and this was reality. Before I even noticed, two more people had died.

It was the rapier warrior from Luka continent and a swordsman from Pilos continent. It was just shameful.

“Kuk, the ghoul is too strong! We can’t even let him scratch us!”

“Miss Shuna, Miss Shuna!”

“Yes, I’m blocking it!”

The surviving warriors dodged the ghoul’s attacks with their lives on the line, and Shuna was running around, trying to block the attacks with her large shield. Although she tried her best to draw his aggro, the Giant Ghoul became enraged and changed his target once a damage dealer hit him even once. In that sense, it was

more intelligent than any of the Floor Masters from before. He made it much harder for the tank to keep his aggro.

I reached the conclusion that everyone except Shuna would die if this continued.

“Ellos, switch!”

“Yeah, switch! ...Switch?”

I held up my Black Earthen Spear and swung it horizontally with great force. With Extending Spear, the spear's range instantly reached 5 meters, and the zombies in the radius of 5 meters all died in a single swing.

“Everyone, go protect the long-range damage dealers. I'll handle the Giant Ghoul.”

“What? Wait, Shin.”

“Make use of what you can. Level-up takes priority over your pride, right?”

At my words, Ellos shut his mouth. He must have realized...

That I was extremely disappointed in my party members.

## Chapter 56. What It Means To Climb The First Dungeon (3)

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I didn't expect an overwhelming victory, but I at least expected them to be strong enough to be considered elites. In truth, they were only slightly better than ordinary explorers. Ellos was the only one strong enough to be called an elite. Shuna had high defense and was passionate, but she was lacking in all other aspects, and Palludia... Well, I didn't really know how to judge a priestess' ability.

However, the explorers from Pilos continent, Luka continent's rapier warrior, and Paul, who had died, were extremely lacking. They acted like they were playing a game, waiting for the right time to strike, and backing out right after to avoid danger.

It might have been necessary to survive until now, but with over 30 percent of the party members acting that way, it was only obvious that the Floor Master would make use of the openings they created. As a result, they all died.

If I remembered correctly, didn't they say they were fighting the demon race that invaded their continent? How could they be so full of leisure? Why weren't they more desperate to survive? Not to mention, they were explorers of the First Dungeon, not the Third or Fourth. They should be their continent's best in terms of potential! I really could not understand.

It was one thing to be lacking in ability, but they were also lacking in their mindset. At least Paul was a bit more fierce. Although he died right away from being overzealous, he was much



better than the ones attacking occasionally, or the ones only using skills when their mana allowed it.

Another thing I didn't like was that everyone expected defeat before we even challenged the Floor Master. However, I let that one slide. What was important was that it annoyed me and made me want to vent this frustration with action.

This is what a real warrior would do!

“Peika, make a path for me!”

[Okay, Master! Eit!]

Over 20 percent of my mana drained out of me in an instant, as Peika put her hands out and let out a cute shout. Immediately afterwards, a laser-like lightning thicker than her own body shot out toward the ghoul, destroying all zombies in its path. Numerous messages of me receiving gold rang out, but I ignored them.

“I made the path, so everyone take care. Peika, you come to me!”

[Okay!]

“We'll follow Shin's orders. Miss Shuna, let's go.”

“B-But, if we just leave everything to Crown Prince-nim, it won't be a raid!”

“This isn’t a raid, Miss Shuna.”

Ellos said with a hint of bitterness.

“It’s a fight for our continents’ survival.”

After absorbing Peika, my Black Earthen Spear flickered with threatening sparks. I ignored the zombies running towards me. I knew they wouldn’t hinder me in the slightest.

“Guooo...”

“Hey, Giant Ghoul. It’s a great day to die, isn’t it?”

When I stopped the Giant Ghoul from chasing after Ellos and the others, who were running back, he glared at me as if he was extremely annoyed. However, he wasn’t scary in the slightest. While taking care of the zombies, I had already learned its movement patterns.

“I’m starting.”

I didn’t plan on using Talaria. I didn’t need to use it. The spear in my hand and Peika. Just the two of them would be enough.

“Guoooooooo!”

“Haat!”

I jumped to the side and dodged his claws easily. At the same time, I stabbed my spear into the back of his hand. He was certainly different from the ordinary ghouls, as his defense was overwhelmingly stronger. My spear could only stab into his skin lightly. It was within my expectations. I stabbed with my spear a few more times. As a result, the spear broke through his skin and blood spurted out.

“Kuaaaaaaaa!”

“Haa! It’s going to sting a little!”

In truth, stabbing consecutively was hard to do with a spear, and would have been hard even if I had a sword. I didn’t know about others, but my stabbing movement concentrated my body’s energy into one point and thrust out. If an ordinary person did such movements consecutively, their muscles and bones would shatter.

However, it was a different story for explorers like myself, whose bodies could grow endlessly. We could protect and strengthen our bodies with the power of mana. Even among dungeon explorers, I, who compressed my bones, muscles, and skin, could easily perform consecutive stabs. I could even do it as I cooked myself some pork belly to eat.

This was what it meant to truly become strong. It was not using the same techniques as always, just with increased strength and

dexterity. It was using techniques that could only be done with increased strength and dexterity!

“Kuaaaa!”

The enraged Giant Ghoul failed in trying to kick me. Then, he swung his claws at me. The attack swiped up from below and even had a wide range, making it hard to avoid. However, it also served as a good chance. A good chance for me to dig into his chest.

Because of his swiping movement, his face and chest were both lowered to the point where they were within my reach without me having to jump.

“Haaaap!”

Another consecutive stabbing. Using the time it would take for his claws to reach me, I stabbed my spear into his face multiple times. Every time my spear collided with his face, it burned with a frightening sound from my Spirit Aura. After receiving a huge injury, the Giant Ghoul became startled and stepped backwards, trying to stomp on me.

“Kuaaaaa!”

“I’m not done yet!”

I concentrated my energy on the Black Earthen Spear. Mana flowed into it following Peruta Circuit’s pathway. In addition, the

body's pure strength that I could control also flowed into it. Gathering in the tip of Black Earthen Spear, they both became concentrated at a single point. This process, which would have taken a longer time without the blessing of a skill, only took an instant to complete, as if a god's power had guided it.

As always, a radiant white light spiraled out. Together with Spirit Aura, it became a spiral of white lightning. My Black Earthen Spear took the form of Zeus' lightning, as it radiated out with a brilliant white light. The Giant Ghoul was clearly uncomfortable. Undead monsters were naturally weak to light. It wanted to stomp and kill me, but Heroic Strike only took a moment to complete.

“Heroic Strike!”

“Kuaaaaaa!”

I shot my spear out with all my strength. It pierced the same area on his face that I had attacked before. At the same time, his wild thrashing stopped. All the zombies stopped their movements as well. In that instant, a cold silence hung in the graveyard.

“Is he dead?”

Ellos whispered quietly. I believed he was dead, but Ellos' words made me raise my guard. As if to answer my suspicion, the Giant Ghoul got up after a bit of struggle. “Ba-Dum.” The sound of a heartbeat rang out from a place I couldn't point out. In the next moment, the injuries he received on his face and in other places

were disappearing. It was as if time was flowing backwards.

[Giant Ghoul uses 'Diehard'! He completely recovers from all injuries, and regains 50 percent of his max HP!]

“Guooooo!”

“You sure sound excited!”

“Damn it, I thought we won!”

“So even with Crown Prince, this is how far we go...”

“Kuk, but it was still a good experience. Who knew we'd go so far on our first try?”

“Just knowing that skill exists is a great help. We'll have to find a way to stop it from being used next time.”

The party members started talking helplessly again. It made me depressed just listening to them. However, I still had some moves left in me. I didn't plan on giving up in the slightest.

“Palludia, do you have attack chants, too?”

“I-I do! Orc... Are you going for it?”

“Don’t call me Orc.”

Lightly answering her, I tapped on my chest where my pocket watch was always hanging.

“Have you seen an orc this strong and cool?”

Although it was embarrassing, I had to exaggerate a bit to lighten up this depressing mood of death and defeat. Confirming that the cooldown time on my Double Potion had ended, I gulped down another Double Potion. The Black Earthen Spear had pierced through his head and flown to some unknown area of the graveyard, but I didn’t necessarily need Black Earthen Spear right now.

“Palludia, attack him however you can! This goes for the archers too! Close-range damage dealers, stay back and protect them!”

At my command, Palludia nodded her head and began to chant. Baruela and the elf archer both seemed to be using a skill as they mumbled something and aimed their bows at the Giant Ghoul. Meanwhile, the fully recovered Giant Ghoul charged towards me as he glared angrily. How annoying. If he was smaller, I would have smacked him away. It was truly a shame.

“Don’t think you’re the only one with skills.”

‘I was going to end it with a bang, but you ruined my plan with that cheaty skill! I won’t forgive you for that!’ I could use my spear again like an adult, but I wanted to let this ghoul understand the depressing feeling I had. With a deep breath, I shouted.

“Uwaaaaaak!”

[You used Orc Lord’s Warcry! All party members are cleansed of negative status effects. All party members’ attack power increases by 50 percent for the duration. All party members become super-armored, unfazed by enemy attacks.]

“W-What!?”

“This is Orc Lord’s Warcry!”

“I, I’ve heard of it before. That Crown Prince uses Floor Masters’ skills...”

“GUOOOOOOO!”

The Giant Ghoul roared as it faced me, then swung his claws at me. I shouted before he could reach me.

“Dragon Skin!”



“Kak!”

The Giant Ghoul howled. His claws had hit my chest and shattered. As expected, Dragon Skin worked even against Floor Masters! I lifted my hand, which was slower because of Dragon Skin, and tightly gripped the Giant Ghoul’s arm. Now that it was within my grasp, I would not let go.

“Kuooooo!”

“You’re dead. You ever hear of pay to win? This is skill to win! Everyone, he can’t move, so attack!”

“O, O Mitarus! Use your subject’s body and bring down the iron mace on thy enemy who disrupts the world’s justice!”

“Sniping Shot!”

“Arrow Bomb!”

The three girls’ attacks bombarded the Giant Ghoul. Although he shook his body in an attempt to dodge them, his resistance subsided when I grabbed another one of his claws and broke it. Immediately afterwards, a silver mace appeared in the air. A sharp arrow and an arrow imbued with black aura flew toward the Giant Ghoul, and all three weapons struck the Giant Ghoul. The black aura arrow even exploded upon contact, leaving behind a black trace on his face.

The Giant Ghoul screamed and used his free hand to scour the ground below. I realized he was looking for zombies to eat. Ellos seemed to have noticed it as well.

“Kill the zombies near his hands!”

“Understood!”

The elf archer and Baruela crazily shot their arrows the moment Ellos’ words left his mouth. The zombies rising from the ground fell and crumbled. Unable to recover his wounds, the Giant Ghoul let out an angry roar.

“KIAAAAAA!”

“As always, the final blow should be done by the main character!”

I jumped on his arm. “Uwoah.” I was extremely slow from Dragon Skin’s effect. Even so, I focused and tightly gripped on his body, crawling slowly toward his face. Although I thought it looked a bit unsightly, I didn’t pay any attention to it.

After the short, yet long, climb, I stood on the Giant Ghoul’s shoulder. Although it struggled, trying to make me fall, I tightly grabbed onto his ear. Then, I shouted.

“Dark Thunder Explosion!”

# Chapter 57. What It Means To Climb The First Dungeon (4)

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“Huk, he can even use that skill!”

“Just what is a Hero?”

“Look, the ghoul!”

Dark Thunder Explosion attacked all targets in its area of effect. Even though the Giant Ghoul was huge, his entire body was within Dark Thunder Explosion’s range. He had essentially received the entire force of the attack, which would usually be spread out across dozens of enemies. Plus, at the same time I used the skill, I punched my fist in his head.

“Die! Die! Die!”

“Kuaaaaaaaaak!”

By the time Dark Thunder Explosion came to an end, the Giant Ghoul looked no different than before he used Diehard. I wasn’t done yet. I called Peika. Since I had canceled Spirit Aura after throwing the spear, she answered immediately to my call.

“Peika, come inside my gauntlet!”

[Uu, you’re using that again?]

“Please, Peika.”

[Okay... But you have to listen to one wish, Master!]

With a bit of complaint, Peika infused herself into my gauntlet. Thinking that her wish was probably for me to play with her later, I shouted.

“Thunder Beast!”

Seeing lightning shoot out from my body, Ellos seemed exhausted as he said, “I’m too tired to even be surprised.”

Of course, I didn’t pay him any attention. I simply put my first through the Giant Ghoul’s uselessly large head.

Not long afterwards, he collapsed. He was burnt to a crisp, but let out a disgusting smell that anyone would run away from.

[You became level 26 and obtained the qualification to climb to the 26th floor.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[30,000 gold is distributed evenly among party members. You received 4,286 gold.]

[Rewards will be distributed in order of contribution.]

[Kang Shin-nim's contribution is the highest. Choose your reward.]

1. Giant Ghoul's Pants
2. Double Potion
3. 10,000 Gold
4. Skin Strengthening Elixir
5. Giant Ghoul's Boots
6. Rotten Ebony Staff
7. Giant Ghoul's Shoulder Blade]

Hoping that Giant Ghoul's Shoulder Blade wasn't part of the set equipment, I chose the Skin Strengthening Elixir. I was glad it wasn't like the Muscle Strengthening Elixir, where it would only appear with 2 people. Since the Skin Strengthening Elixir came out this time, I suspected one of the Floor Masters would soon have Bone Strengthening Elixirs.

While I was picking my reward, the party members were going crazy.

"We did it!"

"I can't believe we cleared it on our first try. This is a miracle!"

“Crown Prince-nim, you really are amazing... you single handedly brought us victory.”

“I can’t help but be jealous. Just 4 years ago, he couldn’t even advance to the 6th floor as he lacked mana...”

“He’s a Hero. This is his destiny.”

“...”

I got annoyed, as it felt like she was saying I got stronger only because I was a Hero. I didn’t even know what a Hero was! When I snapped my head at them, they all looked away, pretending not to have said anything.

I smirked and swallowed the Skin Strengthening Elixir. I wasn’t planning on continuing with them anyways, and I only knew them through Ellos and Palludia. I wasn’t motivated to argue with them in the slightest.

[By consuming the Skin Strengthening Elixir, your skin becomes tougher and more resilient. Constitution and Charm both increase by 1.]

Since my defense went up, it made sense that constitution went up, but why did charm go up as well? Could this Skin Strengthening Elixir be used as a beauty product? Mother would go

crazy if she knew. Alright, I'll let father grind them. It was his wife becoming more beautiful, so I'm sure he'd do it on his own. Yua? My Yua's skin was and would always be perfect!

I turned around. Perhaps it was coincidental, but all the party members were staring at me. It seemed they already finished choosing their rewards.

“Crown Prince-nim, thank you. I'll be going ahead.”

With just that, the surviving member from the Pilos continent's party left. I was slightly lost for words at his lightning fast exit, but I wasn't concerned with him.

Ellos approached me, handing me my Black Earthen Spear that he likely picked up while I was busy.

“Friend, we won because of you. Just like 4 years ago.”

“No, you could have won without me, though most people would have been kicked out of the dungeon in the process.”

“... I'm going to fight him again. I have to help Paul get through.”

“I won't help you with that. I joined this party to raid with you, not to help you pass through... I only helped today because I didn't want to see people dying in front of me for no reason.”

“Of course.”

Ellos smiled bitterly. He'd made only one miscalculation, and that was my strength. He must be thinking our difference in ability made this laughable result.

However, I thought differently. I didn't like the mindsets they had showed since the beginning. In attitude during battle or anything else, they could not even compare to Ren, not even Ellos.

“Why is everyone so conservative? It's not like they'll really die, so why can't they be a little more daring? I've realized this as I watched different dungeon explorers, but that's just how you guys looked today. Like people that didn't want to advance to higher floors.”

At my words, the people remaining flinched slightly. What, was that true? My mouth half-opened from the shock. Of course, Ellos was the only one who would answer my suspicions.

“In truth... you might be right. After becoming dungeon explorers, they receive the highest treatment from their respective countries. Although it is to be used as tools for battle against the invaders, the good treatment comes before that. After reaching a certain level... that is, after becoming Silver rank, they're treated almost like royalty. Until they're sent to the battlefield, that is.”

“So?”



“When their level goes up, their countries would treat them better, but they would also be sent to more dangerous places... All dungeon explorers want to avoid that to a certain extent, and this sentiment might have been reflected as being conservative in Floor Master battles. If they died in the process, they would be safer and they can use the excuse that they did their best, while fully enjoying the benefits of being a dungeon explorer. It’s probably the same in other worlds. For dungeon explorers, their initial ambition of wanting to protect their worlds becomes fainter as they climb...”

After hearing this, I remembered. At the 5th and 10th floors, the explorers were happy and excited at the prospect of advancing forward.

But starting from the 15th floor, people were more surprised and shocked than happy. Perhaps that party leader from my first Dark Ratman raid wanted to lead the party to its death on purpose.

In the one raid party I had on the 20th floor, the party members became angry at Ren for making their friends die. They should have been happy first, or thanked me for my work.

In other words, they might not have been happy to advance past the 20th floor. Of course, that wasn’t to say they weren’t happy in the slightest, but they must have felt equal or greater pressure from having to advance onward. It was absurd.

“Stupid! That weakness of theirs is going to lead to their deaths one day! That’s simply in the present!”

“... I know. I know full well.”

Why dungeon explorers didn't adventure. I finally understood a bit of what Loretta and I talked about. These so-called First Dungeon explorers! Even if they were chosen by other explorers and not by the dungeon itself, how could they be so shameful!?

“But not everyone is like that, Shin! I hope you aren't too disillusioned about dungeon explorers.”

“I know. If the dungeon only had people like them, their worlds would have been ruined already! ... And I don't think you're someone like that either.”

“Thanks, but in truth, I'm not that different. Both in terms of ability and bravery, I'm no match for you. I learned a lot from you today. 4 years ago, I came to admire you and aspired to become like you. I remembered that feeling today.”

I hesitated. Ellos' eyes were sincere. At least in my eyes, his willpower was there.

“Orc... Kang Shin! I, I'm the same. Don't misunderstand! I'm only trying to grow stronger so I can fight the demon race!”

“Yeah, Palludia, I know. You were a lot different than 4 years ago. Your performance today was dazzling.”

“Hiik!”

I meant to compliment her, but Palludia let out a strange squeal and shrunk back with a bright red face. She really was weird. Shuna was standing next to her stealing glances at me from behind her shield. I didn't know why, so I just let her be. Instead, I looked at Ellos.

“Ellos, how about you come with me for a little while? Climb the dungeon with me.”

Of course, I didn't mean I'd continue with him forever. It was just temporary, until he learned something from me. However, in a way, I already knew how he would respond. It was better to say I was going out of my way to sever the lingering attachment he would have.

As expected, Ellos shook his head.

“Sorry, Shin. But I have to lead my party members.”

“I see. Well, you are a leader before you are a warrior.”

That was enough. Ellos didn't need to change drastically. Rather, it was his party members that had to change. Both Paul and Baruela had the right mindset. It was their skills that were lacking. But there wasn't much they could do about it. They could only keep working hard. If that wasn't enough, although it was a bit cruel, that was the extent of their talent.

“You’re not going to change your party, right?”

“Yeah. I want to keep going with them until the end. I believe I can.”

“Then that’s good enough. Good luck. You’ll all need to change a lot. I’m off.”

“Yeah, thanks. I’ll contact you again. Today was a great experience.”

“Kang Shin, wait!”

After saying my goodbye to Ellos and even turning to Baruela and bowing goodbye to her, I wanted to return to the dungeon I came from, but Palludia grabbed onto me. When I looked at her, she seemed to be lost for words as she her lips trembled without making a sound.

When I urged her on with my gaze, she finally managed to open her mouth.

“R-Resi... Residential Area, have you been there?”

“Not yet.”

“I-If you come... contact me.”

“Hm? Why?”

“Just do it!”

For some reason, Palludia looked like she was about to cry. Plus, her face was bright red like it was about to blow up. She looked dejected, yet also happy. I didn't know what her face was trying to say. Next to her, Shuna glanced back and forth between my face and Palludia's as if she knew what Palludia meant.

“Ludia! You... how...?”

“Shuna, be quiet! I have no other choice!”

“But that's not what you said before! Liar! Just admit that you just fell in lo... ooop! Ooop!”

Palludia covered Shuna's mouth with her hands, and dealt a knee kick to her waist. With her high defense, Shuna didn't seem to be in pain, but seeing two grown-up women in such an active posture made me feel slightly embarrassed.

“I'll contact you. Can I go now?”

“H-Hurry up and leave!”

“Crown Prince-niiim!”

I turned my eyes away from Shuna, who was trying to tell me something even as Palludia was trying to stop her. My eyes then met the elf archer's, who gave me a respectful bow. I still didn't know why she was acting that way. Then I left the party.

Although a lot of confusing things had happened, the raid had finished successfully.

# Chapter 58. Event Raid (1)

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Warriors needed rest.

If I said so myself, not signing up for any classes on Friday was a godly move. Sprawled on the living room couch, I blanked out. I'd been staying too busy lately. I needed some rest. A month had passed since the midterms ended. It was that time of the school season when professors reveled in the complaints of students as they bombarded them with assignments. However, that had nothing to do with me. Unless it was an absolutely important assignment, I boldly skipped them all. I was busy being a dungeon explorer. How was I supposed to find the time to do assignments?

As such, I was resting. Since I was fighting the Giant Ghoul three times a day, I believed I had the right. It was why I got up so early in the morning to quickly do my daily Floor Master battles!

Until the 25th floor, there was no shortage of people to join my party. Even if there weren't a lot of people, I could easily find four or five people to join my party. But the 25th floor was different. There were people who refused to participate unless it was a full party of 10, and there weren't that many challengers either.

20th floor and below was the so-called beginner's area. There were a lot of apprentice explorers who wanted to challenge the boss raid, but things were different starting from the 25th floor. Those with ability had already gone up and those without ability couldn't make it here in the first place. As such, the number of explorers between the 25th and 40th floor was apparently quite small. It's also said that the dungeon's difficulty shot up from the

40th floor, resulting in many explorers who were forced to make meaningless challenges without being able to climb up. Of course, that was not important to me right now.

In a way, since the number of First Dungeon explorers was less than 40,000, it was surprising that I could easily find people to raid with. No matter how famous my Crown Prince name was, there wasn't much I could do with how few people actually wanted to climb.

However, if I didn't find at least one person to join my party, I couldn't obtain Skin Strengthening Elixirs. When I explained my frustration to Loretta, she made a dumbfounded smile, and took out an item to help with my problem.

[This is a Party Member Scarecrow! It increases the number of rewards by one. Ah, you can still only pick one though. Don't be surprised, this miraculous item is only 10,000 gold a piece!]

[Loretta, your sales results have been skyrocketing thanks to me, right?]

[... I, I'll make it 8,000 gold a piece.]

[I love you, Loretta!]

[Uuuu... 5... 5,000 a piece! I'll make it 5,000 gold!]

[... Eh? Why did you lower it again?]



[Eh? ... Ah, Aaaaaah! C-Cancel! Cancel what I just said!]

[A woman's words are worth a thousand gold!]

I didn't understand why Loretta lowered the cost again from 8,000 gold, but thanks to the Party Member Scarecrows I got for just 5,000 gold each, I was able to get Skin Strengthening Elixirs by doing Floor Master raids alone.

My Giant Ghoul grind was nearing its end. My strength and charm had already gone up by 9 each, and it seemed the Skin Strengthening Elixir's effect was quite noticeable on my skin, as mother gave me stinging glares. It was the kind of glare that said, 'If you have good things, don't keep them to yourself and fork some over.' Sorry, mother, but I wasn't using them as beauty products!

As I was thinking all these things while sprawled on the couch like a lion after its meal, the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs reached my ears. It was Yua.

"Ah, Yua, are you going to school?"

"Oppa, today is a national holiday."

When I turned around, she was in her casual clothes. I thought I was looking at an angel for a second, but it really was Yua. Whew, I almost got confused. Yua wasn't an angel, but a reincarnated

angel. I had to remember.

“You should rest then. Even students need to let their brains rest once in a while.”

“Ah, that’s... Oppa, you’re not busy today, right?”

Yua asked carefully after a bit of hesitation. I nodded my head.

“Yeah, I don’t have classes today, so I’m resting.”

“Um, oppa.”

“You can just say it.”

“I-If it’s okay... do you want to go to the movies with me?”

I shot up from the couch immediately. Staying sprawled on the couch or going to movies with Yua. It was clear which was a better way to spend my rest day.

“Of course, oppa is free. Let’s go to the movies.”

“But oppa, don’t you have to go to the dungeon today? You seemed busy lately...”

“Not at all! I already finished what I had to do today, so I was

bored. I'm thankful you asked."

"Hehe... Thanks, oppa. Then I'll get changed and get ready."

"Okay, I'll get ready too."

Just like that, Yua and I were at the movie theater 30 minutes later. I could feel the gazes of surrounding people when we were walking with our arms linked, but I paid them no mind. It was because Yua was too pretty.

"What movie are we watching?"

"This one here. My friends said it was fun, but I didn't have anyone to watch it with since they already watched it."

"I see. But Yua, if a boy ever invites you to the movies, I'd like you to discuss it with me first. I can't leave just anyone to escort Yua."

My eyes were genuine and serious. At least, that's what I thought.

"Ah, um... I'm scared of boys, so I'm not really friends with them."

"Really? That's okay then. Remember, all men are evil. Except father and oppa, of course."

“Chii, that’s what you always say.”

“It’s true. Men are evil. Yua wouldn’t even believe how evil they are.”

It was true, especially teenage boys. As someone who had been one before, I could attest to it! Yua could only enjoy her student life without knowing the ferociousness of teenage boys because of the safety device father and I put in without her knowledge!

“What about oppa?”

“Men like oppa are rare. Oppa will carefully pick out suitable candidates for Yua, so Yua can just choose among them. If you want, you don’t have to choose anyone. Oppa will support you your entire life!”

I accidentally went a little too wild. I carefully glanced at Yua, hoping she wasn’t looking at me in contempt. Thankfully, she was laughing adorably.

“Okay, oppa. I’ll believe in oppa’s word and live off oppa forever. I’ll be a mean sister-in-law too.”

“Of course! Yua is oppa’s first priority!”

That, I could swear on the heavens! I mean, I doubted anyone

would want to marry me in the first place.

After watching the movie, Yua and I headed to a nearby fast-food restaurant. Although I wanted to bring her to somewhere more expensive, or even buy her the entire restaurant, Yua was a girl who knew how to find happiness in small things. Perhaps she wasn't the reincarnation of an angel, but the reincarnation of an archangel!

“These fries are great!”

“But don't eat too much. You might end up like someone I know.”

“Who?”

“Potato witch.”

I retorted as I sipped on my cup of coke. It was then that I heard the sound of a tray falling on the ground. When I turned around, the potato witch was there. With a pale face, she was shaking.

For the record, the fallen tray didn't have a hamburger, only piles of fries. As always, her actions weren't really hiding her presence, though she was covering herself with a hoody.

“S-S-S-S-S-Shin.”

“Is there a monster nearby? Why are you shaking so much?”

“... Oppa?”

With Yua calling me, I turned back around. She had a very kind smile on her face.

Something was strange. It was undoubtedly a kind smile, but it also felt chilling. Something had to be wrong with my eyes.

“What’s wrong, Yua?”

“Who is that?”

“Shin. Is this your g-g-g-g-girlfriend?”

Unlike Yua’s calm smiling face, Su Ye-Eun was almost tearing up. Was she that sad about dropping her fries? I wasn’t surprised. With a helpless sigh, I let Su Ye-Eun sit down. After all, just letting her stand there would only lead to more bothersome things.

“Hello, I’m oppa’s younger sister, Yua.”

“Ah, hello. I’m Su Ye-Eun.”

After I introduced them to each other, the chill I was getting from Yua disappeared. Su Ye-Eun stopped crying, but was still

noticeably tense. At the same time, I felt a bit uneasy. Something always happened when I met Su Ye-Eun outside school. Was today going to be the same?

“You said you were oppa’s college classmate?”

“Ah, yes. My relationship with Shin has been healthy without anything for you to worry about, yet...”

“Yet? Relationship?”

“Hiik!”

Yua made a beaming smile, but for some reason, Su Ye-Eun started to sweat and was unable to meet Yua’s eyes.

“You’re his college classmate, right?”

“Y-Yes.”

“You’re not dating him, but just classmates.”

“Y-Yes, that’s right.”

“Then relationship wasn’t the right word, huhu. I worried for nothing.”

Dimples appeared on Yua's face. Eh? A chill swept over me again. Did Yua awaken? When I was seriously contemplating the possibility that Yua became an ability user, Yua interrupted.

“Take good care of oppa, Ye-Eun unni. As you can see, oppa is very pure and unwavering. If a bad woman approaches him, he'll easily get entangled. I hope you can take care of oppa, purely as a friend.”

“Y-Yes.”

“And I'm younger, so you don't have to talk so politely.”

“Y-Ye... Okay.”

While Yua and Su Ye-Eun exchanged words I couldn't comprehend, I simply ate my hamburger. Girls really talked in some secret code. I couldn't understand a thing. However, I did understand two things. One was that Su Ye-Eun was powerless against Yua for some reason, and another was that Yua might have an ability to control cold.

By the time their conversation ended, I was crumpling up my hamburger wrapper.

“Do you want to go back, Yua? Is there anything you want to buy?”

“Mm... Oppa, can we go window shopping for clothes?”



“Sure, of course we can!”

When we left the restaurant after throwing away our trash, Su Ye-Eun was silently following us. With her stealth ability that would make even government top-secret agencies want to scout her, it was no surprise. Yua gave her a glance, but only made a small smile.

Soon after, the uneasy feeling I had from seeing Su Ye-Eun came true. When we were passing by a store with a TV by the window, a breaking news came on.

[Breaking news. The Gate located in China’s Guangzhou city shopping mall disappeared, and a giant boar over 50 meters tall appeared. The Chinese government has already deployed Guardians to stop the boar’s rampage, but there have already been over a thousand confirmed casualties...]

[Giant monsters likewise appeared at the Gates in Shanghai and Beijing, causing massive civilian casualties. The Chinese government has explained that this incident was caused by rogues who sneaked into the Gate without their permission. However, given that all five Gates located in China disappeared within a short period of time, and that large number of Guardians were gathered at the Gate locations, their words are likely untrue...]

I stopped walking. On TV, I saw a giant boar the size of a building running around in Guangzhou city. Several buildings had already fallen, making the scene look like something from the movies. The

Giant Boar's relentless running was causing buildings to collapse and the asphalt road to tremor. In front of it were small dots, which I assumed were Chinese Guardians. Of course, they weren't a match for the Giant Boar. Civilian casualties? It would probably be easier to count the number of people that survived.

Immediately afterwards, three messages rang in my ear.

[An Event Raid has broken out! C+-rank 500-man Raid, 'Giant Boar.' Any dungeon explorers from Earth may participate. Would you like to participate? The moment you express your desire to participate, you will be teleported to the corresponding location. You will return to your original location after clearing the Event Raid.]

[An Event Raid has broken out! C-rank 1,000-man Raid, 'Mini Kraken Wave.' Any dungeon explorers from Earth may participate. Would you like to participate? The moment you express your desire to participate, you will be teleported to the corresponding location. You will return to your original location after clearing the Event Raid.]

[An Event Raid has broken out! C+-rank 300-man, 'Giant Swordtiger.' Any dungeon explorers from Earth may participate. Would you like to participate? The moment you express your desire to participate, you will be teleported to the corresponding location. You will return to your original location after clearing the Event Raid.]

## Chapter 59. Event Raid (2)

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China really was unlucky. Of the five dungeons they had, boss monsters appeared in two of the C+-ranked ones. Not to mention, all of them were large-scale raids with over 300 people. Just who gave the orders to clear all five dungeons at once? Even after Mastiford warned them about the danger! Did they look down on raid bosses!?

Of course, if they cleared the dungeons one by one, the international community would have given them stinging glares. Even so, they cleared all five at once? I almost wanted to knock their heads to check if their brains were there. Did they need a giant 'don't touch' sign? Did they want to serve as an example for other countries? Did they really want to kill a raid boss? Did they want monster corpses and Bluestones that badly? What about all the civilians and tourists that were swept up? Countless questions swam through my head as I felt enraged.

I opened the dungeon explorers' communication channel. As always, Mastiford was the first to step up and talk. With the situation being as it is, she was rather serious.

[You guys heard, right?]

[Heard and saw.]

Walker answered Mastiford. At the same time, all five of us let out a deep sigh.

[I really want to burn up all those government bastards.]

[Unni...]

[Mastiford-ssi, calm down. China is too big for Mastiford-ssi to take on alone.]

[I'm sure the Chinese government will be content with this situation. When those giant monsters die, they will naturally leave huge rewards. Imagine if a Bluestone appeared.]

[If they were aiming for the raid bosses in the first place, they should have prepared for it properly! Why didn't they evacuate the civilians!?!]

[Other countries would have found out if they did. They probably didn't explain things fully to the ability users either. I doubt even they expected such huge monsters to appear. I mean, even I'm surprised by their size. The Mini Krakens are small, but look at the sheer number of them.]

[What a bunch of human trash. What do they think human lives are?]

[But Mastiford, isn't what you did in Yeungdeungpo the same? What if a raid monster as big as China's appeared? Not to mention, if a raid boss from an A-rank dungeon appeared in the middle of Seoul, the damage would have been much more too.]

[Please, I'm an SS-rank ability user and dungeon explorer. Even if an A-rank 500-man raid broke out and a giant monster appeared, I could have taken care of it without any civilian casualties. I wouldn't have suggested it otherwise!]

If this was the first time I talked to Mastiford, I would have snorted at her claim, calling it absurd. Now that I had partied with her, I could nod my head and agree. Her animal kingdom... Anyone that saw her Army of Flames would agree. I didn't think that was her full power either.

“Oppa, what's wrong? Do you have someone you know in China?”

“Shin, are you okay?”

At that moment, I realized my friend and younger sister were looking at me with worried eyes. I replied with a bitter smile.

“Sorry, let's go back for today. I'm a bit worried now after hearing that news about China.”

“Okay, oppa. Let's go home.”

Yua simply agreed and linked her arms with mine. I thought this side of Yua was very admirable. On the other hand, Su Ye-Eun made a very unhappy expression and glared back and forth between me and Yua. She then opened her mouth as if to say something, but closed it silently as she glanced at the disastrous

scene being shown on TV. Thankfully, she had a sense of emergency.

“I’ll see you later.”

“Yeah, see you at school.”

After parting with Su Ye-Eun, I headed home with Yua. All the while, the conversation among dungeon explorers was still going on.

[Unni, what are you going to do?]

[I talked to my country’s Guardian, but it seems the Chinese government is refusing any offers of assistance. They’re saying the Chinese Guardian and Freedom Wing can take care of it by themselves. Participating in the raid on our own accord is a violation of China’s right to monster subjugation.]

[So you’re saying we can only suck on our thumbs and wait.]

At Walker’s words, everyone became silent. I asked.

[But China has many strong ability users, right? I heard they even have an SS-rank.]

[They do. It’s a Ajumma named Xin Shaomei.]

[That sounds like a name from a drama or movie.]

[The problem is that this Ajumma is a special-type ability user. She can cast a debuff that significantly lowers the enemy's ability. That's it. Her body is weaker than a D-rank, and she can't do anything else. She calls herself a Curse Magician.]

[China should have at least 20 S-rank ability users. Although half of them are outside of the country, the other half are still there. Even if the monsters are massive-types, the strongest is still C+-rank. If they team up with Xin Shaomei, they should be able to easily take care of one.]

[But there are three boss monsters. What are the other two places supposed to do?]

[I suppose A and B-rank ability users will take care of those. They should have a large number of them.]

I took out my cell phone and checked China's current situation. I found a live stream footage of Shanghai, where the Mini Krakens had appeared. There, a bewitching beauty in a luxurious violet dress was being protected by countless ability users.

[Mastiford-ssi, can you confirm for me? Is the ability user in Shanghai the SS-ranked ability user?]

[Yep, that's Xin Shaomei. It seems a lot of the S-ranked ability users are there too. Ah, some of them seemed to have gone to

Beijing. It must be because they're bigger cities than Guangzhou.]

[What about Guangzhou then?]

[Look. There are ability users there.]

China did indeed have a large population. Countless ability users were also in Guangzhou, fighting the Giant Boar that had appeared. However, the Giant Boar was easily pushing back the ability users with its massive size. The ability users, who did not want to get close to it, used their abilities to attack it or tie it down. However, none of them succeeded in dealing any damage. In fact, the boar seemed to be getting stronger instead.

Wait, it was clearly getting bigger!

[It's a mana-eater type.]

[Can you explain what you mean, Walker-ssi?]

[It's simple. There are raid bosses that get stronger as they absorb mana. Rather than using purely magical attacks, you have to use melee attacks that are imbued with mana. However, if you fail to notice that and continue pouring magic at them from a distance...]

[Then?]

[The raid boss evolves! 'Giant Boar' evolves to B-rank 'Giant Iron



Boar’!]

[That happens.]

[Thanks for letting me know...]

On TV, the Giant Boar, no, the Giant Iron Boar, went through a massive change. Its short mane grew longer and its hooves became tougher. Its red eyes turned black, yet still reflected sunlight as if they were metallic.

The ability users that were throwing long-ranged attacks became frightened by the sudden change and fell back. Free from the barrage of attacks, the Giant Iron Boar let out a happy roar and trampled on the nearby buildings, along with the civilians and ability users who could not get away in time. Their futile deaths almost made me laugh.

“I have to go.”

“Oppa!”

Shoot, I let my thoughts slip out. Watching the startled Yua grab onto me, I became flustered. In the communication channel, Mastiford and Walker were both making a fuss.

[The request for assistance isn’t coming! Those idiots, they want to continue by themselves!]

[They're doing quite well with Shanghai's Mini Krakens. As expected of an SS-rank ability user, the Mini Krakens can't do a thing against her. Since Beijing is their capital, most of their elite forces seem to be there. It might take some time, but they won't have any problem killing the Giant Swordtiger.]

[Walker, can you go to Guangzhou?]

[Why would I go to that dangerous place? It's not even my country.]

[How can you be so selfish!? There are a countless number of people dying even as we speak!]

[Then what about you, Mastiford? You're SS-ranked. Even though that boar is a mana-eater, I doubt it'll be able to withstand your mana.]

[Of course I want to go! I really do! But... my face and ability are too well known!]

Mastiford sounded like she was crying. She was right. If she went to Guangzhou, China won't just let it be. They'd accuse Britain of looking down on them, aiming for their resources, or boasting the fact they had two SS-ranked ability users. It was sure to become an international problem.

Even if Britain had two SS-rank ability users, they could not

ignore China's power. After all, with their large population, China had many S-rank ability users. Although they only had one SS-rank ability users, with her debuff ability, they wouldn't be afraid of two SS-rank ability users.

“Oppa, you're kidding, right? Tell me you didn't mean it!”

“Uh, you see, Yua... Oppa is actually really strong.”

“Oppa!”

The people around us looked our way. Yua was surprised by her own shout as she covered her mouth. With a bitter smile, I placed my hands on Yua's shoulders.

“Yua, I'm not kidding. Oppa really is strong. I'll take care of it in a jiff and come back.”

“But oppa, if something goes wrong...”

“I'll escape right away if it becomes too dangerous. Don't worry.”

I had the Return skill. No matter what situation I was in, I could run away if it became too dangerous. I knew what was important to me.

“Oppa...”

“Really, don’t worry. Have I ever lied to you before?”

“No... but still.”

“Come on, don’t cry. We’re home now, let’s go in.”

“Oppa, can you really come back right away if it becomes dangerous?”

“Of course.”

Yua and I entered our home. There, father was waiting for me. He was wearing a full black set of armor that I had never seen before. Because his helmet covered his face entirely, I thought it was someone else at first. I assumed he had his luck in the dungeon. Perhaps, a named monster or two. I didn’t believe it was better than a Floor Master Set, but I was jealous about how it looked. He looked like a black knight.

“Son, are you going?”

“What about you, father?”

“Don’t ask such an obvious question, son. I always wanted to fight against an opponent that big.”

“Dad’s going too!?”

After the painstaking effort I put into calming her, Yua looked like she was about to cry again. However, father was much more skilled in calming a child.

“Yua, tonight’s dinner is going to be boar meat soup, just wait. Make sure you watch how cool daddy is on TV.”

“Hiing, Dad!”

Although it was useless, seeing that Yua’s target had changed to father, I slowly went into my room and equipped the Lizard Knight Set. With my silver set of armor, I equipped a face-covering helmet like father’s. No one would know that I was Kang Shin or even that I was Yeon Hwawoo.

[Yeon Hwawoo, Yungoong ajusshi! Are the two of you going? Will you? Please!]

[No, of course I won’t.]

[Sorry, lass. My family is my priority.]

[Uk, b-but!]

Although I found it slightly creepy, it seemed father and I had an invisible connection between us. Even without saying anything, our coordination was perfect. Of course, even as I said that, I sent Mastiford a private message.

“I’m going to Guangzhou. Yungoong ajusshi said he’d come too. We just don’t want to let Walker know.”

[Yeon Hwawoo! Thanks, you really are a nice guy!]

“Yeah, yeah. Keep it a secret in the communication channel. You can tell Minami-ssi privately.”

[Leave it to me!]

When I went outside my room, Yua was hanging on father with teary eyes and father seemed to be at a loss for what to do. With my armor fully equipped, I opened my phone to confirm the current situation. I was calm to the point where I could leisurely think about how supernatural I’d look with my armor.

[I think we’re done then. The Chinese Awakened will take care of this problem, though at the cost of civilian casualties.]

[I understood, so shut up, Walker.]

[Whoa, don’t be so sensitive, Flame Witch. I’ll be leaving then.]

[Unni, I can go in your place! I can do it!]

[No, Sumire. That won’t change the fact that I can’t go to China. I know how strong Sumire’s defense is, but Sumire’s still lacking in

offensive power. Although I don't want to admit it, we'll have to listen to Walker. Let's just be patient. Soon, I'll make an organization strong enough that things like this won't happen!]

[Unni... Sorry, if only I was stronger...]

[Uuu, Sumireeee...]

Mastiford, excellent acting skills! I'll leave it to you to explain things to Minami.

In truth, it would have been better for them to not know, but no matter how dense they were, they would find out once they saw our abilities or equipment. It would be impossible to prevent them from finding out. Since the scene of us going wild will undoubtedly be caught on camera, I let Mastiford know beforehand. Not to mention, they were both quite trustworthy.

I didn't know about Walker, yet. He seemed logical and cold, but I didn't know much else. That's why I didn't want to tell Mastiford in the communication channel. Hoping Mastiford would spin it well for Minami, I checked the current situation. The Mini Krakens had suddenly divided and increased in number. Instead of Walker who went silent, Mastiford explained the situation.

[Those guys are mana-eaters too...! They divided in response to the debuff magic! Geez, what's wrong with China!? Is it some cursed land?]

[They aren't hard to deal with individually, but it'll take a long time for them to completely disappear!]

“Father, what are you going to do?”

“I'll fight with my fists. I've got a nice toy, too. No one will notice it was me from this battle.”

Showing the bracelet he had on his gauntlet, father grinned. Of course, I knew his martial arts skill wasn't any worse than mine. With his bracelet that shot out spider webs, I knew he'd do a great job.

“Use your spear if it gets dangerous. No, if it gets dangerous, just run away with me. You remember how my Return skill works, right?”

“Yes, don't worry. Your father's high-rank Martial Arts skill is already level 4.”

Mine was only high-rank level 2! It seemed I was worried for nothing.

“Plus, if I thought it was too dangerous, I wouldn't have said I was going. No matter how precious people's lives are, they can't be more important than mine.”

“You really think the same way I do.”



I lowered my helmet's visor to cover my face completely. I even had Otus' Secret equipped just in case. With my silver hair, people wouldn't suspect that I was Korean even if my helmet came off.

“Let's quickly take care of those weaklings and claim the rewards.”

Us father and son duo had no intention of giving up such massive rewards to the Chinese Guardians. Especially given that they showed no concern for their own citizens! Human lives were one thing, but our goal was the raid itself. We could save human lives and even claim the rewards! We wouldn't let such an opportunity go.

“Oppa, make sure to run away if it gets dangerous!”

“Don't worry, we'll come back soon.”

Yua still seemed worried, so I relieved her anxiety with a loud voice. Then, father and I declared our intention of fighting in the B-rank 500-man Raid at Guangzhou.

The next moment, we found ourselves at Guangzhou's scene of destruction. It was an abrupt teleportation just like when I used Return.

## Chapter 60. Event Raid (3)

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“What!?”

“Who are they!?”

As I didn't know Chinese, I had no idea what they were saying. The only Chinese I knew was 'Have you eaten?' This sentence, if said in Korea, would cause you to get a beating. <sup>1</sup> Even if you said you were pronouncing it wrong or that actual Chinese people wouldn't understand, it didn't matter. You would get beaten without doubt.

In any case, since my words couldn't get through to them, I simply ignored the Awakened present. They weren't worthy of my attention, as they were at a loss for what to do against the Giant Iron Boar. Soon, they wouldn't really care about us anyways.

[KUOOOOOO!]

“The boar! Run!”

“Damn it, it's coming here!”

As I thought, it only took a moment before the Awakened's formation broke down. Magician-type Awakened, who had weak constitutions, would be killed in an instant if the boar got to them. As such, they were hastily running away. It didn't look like there were any S-rank ability users on this battlefield, as no one dared to

face the boar head on. Really, Guangzhou was a big city too! They should be more concerned!

With how many people they had, did they not mind ordinary civilians or weak ability users dying? There was almost no resistance against Guangzhou's boar. There must have been a fair number of tourists too. Although the Chinese government was holding their ground for now, the international community's voice would only get louder as time went on.

When the talk reached the point where they discussed why they refused foreign ability users offer to help, their malicious intent would be revealed fully. I didn't understand why they did something they couldn't handle. Sometimes, adults were surprisingly immature and simple. Yet, they were also cruel.

“Son, it's coming.”

“I'm ready, father.”

The boar roaring out happily as it received magical attacks from all sides was finally about to reach us. As it charged forward, it felled all buildings and trees, and destroyed roads. It was almost as if an earthquake had struck. However, father cast his spider web between all the debris and grabbed on to the one end. When the Giant Boar was right in front of the threads, he sent out the strongest shockwave he could muster. I would never forget what happened afterwards.

[KUOOOOOO!]

The moment the boar was caught in the spider web, it couldn't win against its own forward momentum. Its back legs floated up, followed by his body and front legs, while its face was leaning down. It was truly a moment where a pig (though it was upside down) flew.

I was shocked by father's ability. Just by sending a shockwave into his spider web, he lifted a massive raid boss meant for 500 people to defeat into the air! I didn't know whether it was his ability, his spider web, or the timing, but it was impressive nonetheless.

The boar's legs squirmed around mid-air, but in this situation where things with wings were falling out of the sky, a wingless pig could not stay afloat.

I did not really mind the boar falling down, but I did mind the shockwave that would result from the several thousand-ton boar falling down from dozens of meters in the sky.

“Father!”

“Don't worry. Shock Absorption!”

Immediately afterwards, the boar fell on the ground. However, the shockwave that might have caused a second disaster did not happen. Father's armor simply made a creaking sound. It seemed the massive force took a toll on father's body. Even so, father held on safely, which was what surprised me the most. He then let out a

spirited shout.

“Shock Reflection!”

I covered my ears. A ear-shattering sound wave shook my eardrums. Father’s extra-large shockwave, which even affected his own son, shot out in a line and completely destroyed one of the boar’s hind legs. For the first time since it made its appearance, the boar received a clear blow. Not to mention, it was a fatal blow that robbed it of one of its limbs!

“Well done, father!”

[KUOOOOOOOONG!]

The boar let out a hollow groan. Just its groan caused the earth to tremor and windows on faraway buildings to shatter.

‘I hope no one died from that. I mean, what idiot would stay in a building with all that’s happening?’ Thinking rather useless things, I made my move as well.

“Talaria!”

[You summoned Talaria. For the next 10 minutes, you can freely fly or walk on air. If flying, you will receive an additional 100 percent increase to your movement speed. Remaining time: 09:59:99]

I kicked off the ground. While I was soaring through the air, I called Peika and infused her into my gauntlet.

[Master, are we hunting that giant thing?]

“That’s right, Peika. Tonight’s dinner is boar pork belly!”

I accelerated and charged towards the boar. When it saw me soaring through the air towards it, it stopped crying out in pain and limped up, glaring at me in rage. Father’s excellent focus fire had already caused it to lose its ability to charge. Even so, it was still raging with spirit. It then opened its mouth wide. In the middle of charging towards him, I stopped. Thinking ‘no way,’ I hastily changed my direction just in case. Immediately afterwards, it let out a horrible screech.

[UOOOOOOOONG!]

A shockwave similar to father’s shout came out from its mouth and flashed by below my feet. When I turned around, a building was crumbling down after receiving the shockwave.

“Father, is this your disciple!?”

“Don’t say stupid things and look forward!”

Father shouted as he ran towards me. I also regathered my focus and charged towards the boar. Although it continued to shoot out shockwaves from its mouth, I had nothing to be afraid of after finding out it only flew out in a straight line. I flew even faster. My aim was its left eye.

“Haaaaap! Die!”

‘I really need to do something about my habit of shouting out.’ Murmuring in my mind, I extended my right hand forward and shot into its left eye.

[Critical Hit!]

[KUAAAAAA!]

Its blood splashed onto my armor. My gauntlet imbued with Spirit Aura continued to dig into its eye, flickering with countless lightning. However, a mysterious power prevented me from digging past a certain point in its eye. Was this the barrier I heard raid bosses possessed? Just as I was thinking that, an alert rang out.

[You mastered low-rank Spirit Mastery! The spiritual quality of all beings connected to your soul improves, increasing your affinity to them.]

[You learned mid-rank Spirit Mastery! You become more specialized in handling spiritual power. Souls connected to you by strong bonds become stronger and easier to bring forth.]

In an instant, my Spirit Aura became stronger. I poured my mana into my gauntlet and strengthened Spirit Aura. Peika, who was infused into my gauntlet, shouted.

[Thunder Bomb!]

BOOM! The lightning energy concentrated on my gauntlet exploded out, dying the scenery in front of my eyes in a radiant gold. At the same time, the boar's unpleasant roar rang out.

[KIAAAAAAAAAAAK!]

‘Even if you’re a mana-eater, it looks like you can’t eat mana transposed with elemental power. Peika really is the best!’

In an instant, Peika and I succeeded in breaking through its barrier and bursting its left eye. Even while feeling disgusted by the remains of its eye that splashed onto me, I crawled out of its eye socket.

From the shock and pain of losing its eye, the boar was raving in fury. With just three legs, it stumbled about, unable to find its balance. I, on the other hand, could fly using Talaria. Grabbing onto its hair tightly, I landed on its forehead area.



Then, a strange scene reflected into my eyes. Father was running this way while avoiding several Chinese Awakened.

“Kill them!”

“Not only are they trespassers, they’re thieves who are here to steal China’s resources!”

“Son, these crazy bastards are attacking me instead of the boar!”

They really were crazy bastards. I couldn’t give them points for their actions, but I understood where they came from. The boar had lost a leg and eye. They probably thought they could take it on as it was now. They were trying to take care of father and me who drove the boar to this state so they could claim the boar for themselves.

I was dumbfounded. It wasn’t like I could attack them... No, how did they even think to attack foreign ability users who came to help them? Why don’t they help evacuate civilians who couldn’t escape!?

Then, the boar turned to the direction where many people were gathered even as it writhed in pain. I gripped onto its hair tightly so that I wouldn’t be shaken off.

“Father, I think it’s going your way!”

“Hahahaha!”

Father continued running towards me as he laughed. Facing the boar's charge, the Chinese Awakened gave up their chase and scattered in all directions. However, ability users that seemed high-ranked didn't run away, but pointed stick-like things toward the boar. I liked their backbones, but were they trying to use magic?

“Fireball!”

“Flame Wave!”

“Freezing Lance!”

‘Idiots, stop using magic!’ Just when I was about to yell at them to stop, I blanked out. No matter how I looked at it, that magic... they were targeting me! My back was stinging. They were targeting me for sure! I was so dumbfounded, I couldn't help but laugh.

These idiots! They didn't think to help us who saved them from brink of death, and instead tried to kill us. They weren't even human!

“Dragon Skin!”

My armor shone red. Although I didn't get faster by three times, my defense went up by over three times. However, even after I

took the trouble to strengthen my defense, their attacks didn't even glaze me as they exploded near the boar's nose. The enraged boar opened its mouth and threw out a shockwave.

[KUOOOONG!]

“Kuaaaak!”

“Kuk!”

The magicians weren't able to dodge its shockwave, which traveled faster than bullets. Without even keeping their human appearance, they shattered into pieces and died.

They had to be at least B-rank ability users. I suspected they were more likely A-rank ability users, considered high-ranked amongst all ability users. They died such futile deaths. Even so, I didn't pity them in the slightest. It was the result of them trying to kill another human being. That said, I did feel slightly unpleasant.

“That's enough from you!”

I grabbed onto its hair one by one, using them like icepicks as I climbed its head like a mountain. When I reached the top of its head, I lied down. The boar was going completely wild, charging through the streets of Guangzhou, which no longer even had anything to be broken. Even as it staggered about without a leg, it did not fall and shook its body as it tried to send me flying. The scenery around me constantly changed. Were there still civilians

who couldn't escape? Was father fine?

Then, I caught sight of the scenery below. While Awakened gathered in one place were escaping in all directions like scattering ants, father shot out spider webs from his bracelet and stuck it to the boar's back. He then used it like a rope to climb the boar.

'Oh, father, your rope climbing skills are excellent! But sorry, your chance to shine is over!' With that, I shouted.

“KUAAANG!”

[You used Orc Lord's Warcry! All party members are cleansed of negative status effects. All party members' attack power increases by 50 percent for the duration. All party members become super-armored, unfazed by enemy attacks.]

Then, I continued.

“Dark Thunder Explosion!”

## Chapter 61. Event Raid (4)

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Spirit Aura subsided for an instant, and black lightning flashed from my body. Dark Thunder Explosion's initial lightning struck the boar's body just as I had planned. It was then that I noticed that its body seemed to have a metallic property, just like the name 'Iron Boar' suggested. Its whole body flinched as it was hit by the first hint of lightning energy.

This was a big deal. A giant monster that was over 70 meters in length and 50 meters in height flinched from just a weak lightning energy coming from a 2-meter-tall human? It should have felt like a mosquito bite for most monsters of this size. Dark Thunder Explosion's initial lightning had little meaning. Even humans didn't take much damage from it.

'Wait, what about the magician from before that used lightning magic? ... If it absorbed that magic with its mana-eater property, then was there something special about Dark Thunder Explosion? Then again, Floor Masters wouldn't use ordinary magic.' After reasoning up to that point, I closed my eyes as the black lightning started exploding out from my body. I loved this skill, but because the lightning exploded out from my body, it hurt to look at it.

"Go wild!"

Pzzzzt!

[KUAAAAAAAAA!]

Dark Thunder Explosion seemed to be much more potent than usual. Was it because I was against 'Iron' Boar? The Giant Iron Boar stopped charging for an instant. However, the Dark Thunder Explosion was only now starting!

“B-B-Boom!”

[KUAAAAANG!]

The boar couldn't withstand the pain and rolled on the ground. Rolled! This crazy bastard! Thankfully, I was safe as its head was still hanging in the air. Still, I was almost crushed to death by its weight of several thousand tons. I wouldn't even have had time to escape using Talaria.

No matter how great Dragon Skin was as a defensive skill, it would not have mattered. I would not have just been hit by the force of several thousand tons, but I also would have been crushed between it and the ground. I would have ended up exactly like the Lizard Knight who faced my jujitsu skills. Swallowing my spit, I felt relieved knowing that I had just escaped certain death.

[KUOOOOOOONG!]

Opening my eyes as I still tightly held onto its hair, I gasped. Its hair, which was once shining with a black luster, was now dyed grey and losing strength. When I pulled on it with a bit of strength, it came out. It wasn't only the hair in Dark Thunder Explosion's range. The hair on its entire body was the same. His body really had a metallic property, and had conducted Dark Thunder

Explosions shock throughout its body. With that, it was understandable that even the 500-man raid scaled massive boss monster could not withstand the shock and rolled on the ground.

The boar looked like a pig struck by lightning as its three legs trembled uncontrollably. The melee ranged Awakened, who had only been watching, finally started to approach the boar. From what I could see, there were a quite a few A-ranked ones as well.

The A-ranked ones could have helped out previously, but it seemed they just let the boar be so that they could avoid danger. They really were selfish!

“You people won’t get a chance! Thunder Beast!”

[Master, you can do it!]

With Peika cheering me on, my body became enveloped in golden lightning. Surprisingly, my mana was almost entirely full. Because Dark Thunder Explosion didn’t use up my mana, it had filled up in the meantime. Even so, Thunder Beast would only last 100 seconds max. I lifted my hands up and struck down at the boar’s head.

“Die! Die! Die! Die!”

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Every time I struck down at its head, the lightning in my fists flowed freely down from its head to toes. I didn’t know why, but

each of my lightning attacks damaged its entire body!

“Son, I’m being electrocuted too!”

“Just run! Die! Die!”

Of course, father was joking. My lightning would not damage my party members. However, the Awakened, who were picking on the boar with their swords or spears, weren’t so fortunate. Shocked by the lightning, they trembled and fainted while standing. It served them right!

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

[KUAAAAA!]

The Giant Iron Boar roared and made a final struggle for survival. However, Talaria’s 10-minute time limit was not over yet! No matter how much the boar struggled, how much the roads sunk beneath it, or how many Chinese Awakened joined in or were forced to give up attacking, I didn’t pay them any mind and continued to pummel one area. Then, the lightning energy exploding out from my hands became stronger.

[Thunder Beast becomes level 2! Using the skill will further strengthen your body’s physical ability and lightning power. This skill uses 0.9 percent of your mana and health per second, and uses 0.9 percent of HP and MP per second when used inside



the dungeon.]

Great, the time went up! Excited, I punched with more spirit. I loved watching the Giant Boar twitch every time my fist struck its body. The monster that threatened a large city like Guangzhou was screaming in pain at my fists! This fact acted as a huge catharsis and boost for my spirit.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Crack!

A cracking sound rang out for a moment. I would be finished soon! I accelerated my attacks and struck down incessantly. I could feel the boar's resistance growing fainter. Eventually, it's whole body convulsed one last time.

[Kuoooooooo...!]

After what clearly was its death throes, the boar went limp, the weight crushing the ground even further. It seemed the repair work would take some effort. I quickly deactivated Thunder Beast. Immediately afterwards, a fanfare rang out.

[Event Raid Complete! With just two members, you succeeded in the Event Raid! This Grand Achievement increases the rewards by an enormous amount! Your vastly superior rank to the raid boss decreases the rewards by an enormous amount!]

So there's no difference! Just don't say it then!

[You succeeded in the Event Raid, granting 1 bonus stat. You are the first to succeed in an Event Raid on Earth! You obtained 1 skill point. Current skill points: 10]

[The raid rewards will be distributed in order of contribution.]

[Kang Shin-nim's contribution is the highest. Choose your reward.]

[1. Rage Rush Boots

2. Shockwave Belt]

[You can return to your previous location at any time. Would you like to return?]

Haa, I knew even without seeing. The Rage Rush Boots were likely related to the boar's charging, and the Shockwave Belt was likely related to the shockwaves it shot out from its mouth. Although I liked the shockwave more than the charge... there was the Black Earthen Spear and the ring I got from the Giant Zombie's Attack. Not to mention, father would be better at utilizing the effects of the belt. As such, I decided to yield the belt to father.

After I chose the Rage Rush Boots and put them into my

inventory, father made an extremely satisfied expression as he looked at the reward. No, I couldn't see his expression with the visor he had on, but I assumed that's the expression he had. After seeing that father was unhurt, I checked the surroundings. A large army of Chinese Awakened were encircling us from a distance.

“Don't move!”

“You are under arrest for violation of the international law!”

I didn't know what they were saying, but their expressions seemed to say they wanted to kill us. I smirked. The real world was different the dungeon. That is, the corpse of the raid boss had not disappeared into tiny particles. Their goal was likely this. The product of humans' dirty, ugly greed. Look at the result! The boar you all wanted was here, but countless human lives and the cityscape had been ruined!

They would want the boar even more as a tangible result. If a Bluestone appeared from this boar, there would be money left over after covering the loss from Guangzhou's destroyed city!

“Father, go back first.”

“Alright, I'll see you at home.”

Father shouted that he'd return to his previous location, and disappeared instantly. When the Chinese Awakened saw this, they became shocked and rushed towards me, who was standing on the

boar's head.

“Those bastards!”

“Capture him! Right now!”

I smirked once again and placed my hand on the boar's head. Then, I imagined.

I imagined the boar going into my inventory.

“Huk!”

“The boar disappeared!”

“It's that fucker's doing! Capture him right now!”

“Magic, use magic!”

“Sorry, it's too late!”

Even though it took 240 slots out of my 260 total inventory slots, I successfully managed to store the massive boar into my inventory. I was thankful I didn't have random things stored in there like father. Although they wouldn't be able to see my smirk through my visor, I made an even bigger one just to show my dominance.

The magic attacks, which were used to strengthen the boar, attack us who came to help them, and attempt to steal the boar's corpse, could not reach me. I declared my intention of going back.

Immediately afterwards, I found myself at home.

“Oppa!”

“Wait, oppa is dirty right now!”

Yua seemed to have been waiting for my return, as she jumped at me straight away. I wanted to stop her as the boar's blood, flesh, and other filthy parts were all over me, but I failed to stop Yua. Plus, because I was wearing my armor, I couldn't even feel Yua's embrace!

“Oppa, hic, I was so worried! I almost died from worrying too much!”

Yua didn't mind that I was wearing armor or how dirty I was, as she buried her face near my helmet and cried. I wanted to console her in some way, but I felt like I would be scolded no matter what I said, so I stayed silent. Behind Yua, I could see father shaking his head. He was looking at Yua disappointedly with his helmet in one hand.

“Yua didn't hug daddy...”

“Oppa, oppaaa...”

‘It’s because I ran a more dangerous circus on top of the boar’s head.’ Although I wanted to tell him that, I just swallowed the words. Without father’s help, it would have been much more difficult to kill the boar. Father played a big role in today’s success, as he absorbed the boar’s shockwaves and even destroyed one of its legs.

“Yua, oppa is okay, so calm down. Oppa wants to wash up, okay?”

“Uung, okay... hic.”

Even after saying that, Yua stayed glued to my body for another 5 minutes. It was only after father childishly complained about not getting attention that she let me go. As Yua became dirty from hugging me, father made a shocking offer for all three of us to go into the bath together. I stopped his dangerous suggestion and made Yua enter the bath by the living room, as father and I made our way to the upstairs bathroom.

“You did well today, son.”

“Same for you, father.”

After cleaning the filth off of our bodies, we sat in the large bathtub and exchanged praise. Then, we silently relieved our exhaustion in the bath.

We experienced many things today in less than an hour. However, we decided not to say much about it.

Our strange silence was interrupted by a message that rang out in my ear.

[Yeon Hwawoo, thank you so much! Thanks to you, only Guangzhou's central region has been partially destroyed!]

## Chapter 62. Event Raid (5)

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“Ah, Mastiford-ssi.”

Even with all the effort I put in, the city was still half-destroyed. I didn't know whether to be happy or sad. However, the fact that civilian casualties had not spread was a relief. If father and I didn't kill it, the boar would have kept charging through Guangzhou and destroyed the entire city. If that happened, millions of people would have died.

[You were even stronger than before, at least as strong as S-rank. Ah, of course, I'm still much stronger! Oh, if you're with Yungoong ajusshi, tell him that he looked cool today!]

“We went our way right after the raid. You should tell him yourself, I'm sure he'll be happy.”

[Yeah, I will. Ah, um... Thanks. I was touched. I thought you were selfish and mean, but you're really a good guy! A cool guy! I, Hwaya Mastiford, can guarantee it.]

“I didn't go just to save people. I went because I knew I could win.”

[Even so!]

Mastiford's good mood was clear from the excitement in her voice. Then, she suddenly became quieter.



[Sorry for putting you through all that danger... I hope something like this doesn't happen again, but if it does, I'll be sure to go with you.]

“I wasn't alone. Yungoong ajusshi was there too.”

[Ah, uh, y-yeah.]

Mastiford's voice shook a little. I shook my head at father who was asking what was up. Then, I returned to my conversation with her.

“But yes, we should come up with a plan to deal with something like this. We can't let another Event Raid break out and have a country greedily say they'll take care of it on their own. Guangzhou had tourists from other countries too. We should leverage that fact and create a guideline or procedure for foreign ability user assistance in dealing with giant monster appearances.”

[Don't worry, I'll take care of it. This time, I'll show you the weight that an SS-rank's words have! I'm done sitting still and shaking my legs while I fully know others are dying!]

Mastiford's voice was filled with rage and confidence. Thinking how she was fiery like flames, I laughed.

“What about Beijing and Shanghai?”

[The monsters there were successfully suppressed. Because the Chinese government deployed high-ranking ability users to both Shanghai and Beijing, their civilian casualties and materialistic damage were lower than Guangzhou's. Two S-rank ability users died in the process, though.]

“Died!? S-ranks?”

[Yep. It was from the Mini Krakens' poison. Perhaps because the Curse Magician was there, they didn't send any healers above A-rank. Stupid. Because of their mana-eater property, the Mini Krakens evolved to near B+-rank, making their venom highly lethal. Two magicians without any resistance against them died. I think even the Chinese ability users were shocked.]

“Tsk.”

Inside the bath, I closed my eyes and pondered. They really died in vain. Less than 0.1 percent of ability users were S-ranked, making them elites amongst elites. However, they died in a C-rank boss raid. It was the result of recklessly attacking the enemy without knowing their special property.

Thinking how they died so stupidly while enjoying luxurious lives, a sense of emptiness swept over me. Reality was this unpredictable and cold-hearted. Everyone had to realize that the change that came with the second moon was not some gift from God.

When I was bitterly thinking about the people that died,

Mastiford called me.

[Um... Yeon Hwawoo.]

“Yeah?”

[When are you going to stop calling me Mastiford-ssi? It feels stiff. You don't talk so formally otherwise.]

“... Hm?”

[When it's just the two of us talking, call me Hwaya. That's easier and simpler, right? Okay, that's that! Thanks for today!]

With that, she disappeared. I forgot the serious things I was pondering and became flustered. Eh? Uh...

“Is she saying we should be friends?”

“What do you mean, son?”

“Uh... it's nothing.”

It felt a bit weird to tell father about it. I didn't know why, but I found my heart pounding slightly... Why was it pounding? Was something wrong with me?

“Ah, it must be because I made a new friend.”

I was satisfied with the answer I came up with. I had finally obtained the qualification to face Hwaya Eleni Mastiford eye to eye. From herself, no less!

She didn't ask me to work under her either. She thanked me, and said she'd join me in the future. It meant no one would be under anyone's orders, and that we would stand on equal footing. As friends. I thought my heart was pounding at the excitement of being acknowledged as a friend by an SS-rank ability user like herself.

That was probably it. Yep, probably.

That day, what happened at Guangzhou was broadcasted to the whole world. A knight in a black suit of armor and a knight in a silver suit of armor suddenly appeared out of nowhere and disappeared along with the Giant Iron Boar after defeating it.

The Chinese government treated them as international criminals and declared that they'd capture them as they gritted their teeth. On the other hand, almost all other nations publicly denounced China, saying that they attacked this era's true knights. Not to mention, they attacked China for ignoring the safety of their citizens and foreign citizens that were there for tourism and business, all in their greed for monster remains.

Countless international lawsuits barraged them, the Chinese government sweated to take care of them all.

In the end, through a joint public negotiation between Guardian and Freedom Wing, an international law was created to outline the procedure of Guardian, Freedom Wing, and rogue ability users when another massive monster outbreak occurred. Although a similar law already existed, what happened with China today emphasized the importance of such laws, repealing and reinstituting a completely new, strengthened law.

In the case that civilian evacuation was not prioritized, or the monsters were not taken care of within a fixed amount of time, there would be no problem even if foreign countries' ability users appeared to help out.

There was already a law that said any ability users counter attacking in self-defense in case of a monster outbreak would not be held responsible for damages. As such, the ability users that were in the area would automatically be eligible to fight any monsters.

This new law allowed combat units of each country's Guardians and Freedom Wings to act more freely. When an event raid occurred in a country, these combat units of neighboring countries could be deployed as soon as a fixed amount of time passed.

Of course, the law worked differently for dungeon explorers. We could teleport to target locations as soon as the fixed time passed.

[Rather interesting rumors are going around. Two people in a full suit of armor suddenly teleported in, an ability user that could

teleport people teleported two strong melee ability users into battle, etc. It would seem that the characters from these rumors are among us.]

[That's an interesting story, but rumors are rumors.]

[You aren't wrong, but it's clear that these aren't just rumors. Not to mention, I've seen what happened at Guangzhou. Mastiford couldn't have been there, especially since I already know her ability. That would mean the culprit is among the three of you.]

[I could say the same about you, Walker. Not that I think you'd be the type to do something so admirable.]

[You're right, I wouldn't do something like that... I'll let this conversation rest here.]

Of the two armored knights that appeared in Guangzhou, the media began to call the one in black suit of armor, 'Dark Knight,' while the one who freely controlled lightning was called 'Thunder Knight.' These nicknames spread to other media platforms and became universal. Every time I heard the media call us Dark Knight and Thunder Knight, I couldn't help but cringe.

“My Thunder Knight, bring your father some water.”

“Dark Knight-nim, why don't you get it yourself?”

“Huhu, you must be itching for battle, Thunder Knight.”

“You must be quite bored yourself, Dark Knight-nim!”

... After a few battles with our honor on the line, we negotiated by agreeing to never call each other by our nicknames.

\*

[Rage Rush Boots (Unique)

Durability – 170/170

Defense – 240

Equipment Limit – Level 35+, 100+ Dexterity, 80+ Constitution

Options – Strength +5, Dexterity +10; Increases the effectiveness of all rush-type skills by 50 percent.]

The boots I got from the Giant Iron Boar was incomparably stronger than the Lizard Knight Set in terms of defense. Not to mention, the boots looked extremely fancy as it let out a black luster. Unfortunately, my level and stats weren't high enough to equip it. Plus, equipping it would break my set effect, though it would technically be made up for by Rage Rush Boots' options. As I didn't have any rush-type skills, the boots didn't have much effect

on me either. As such, it was trapped in my inventory for now.

Of course, not having these boots didn't mean I couldn't hunt the Giant Ghoul by myself. Even today, I easily hunted a Giant Ghoul and consumed Skin Strengthening Elixirs.

[Your skin becomes strengthened to the limit, becoming tough enough to withstand spears and swords without armor. All blemishes on your skin disappear, making it even smoother and clear. Your constitution and charm both increase by 3. It seems consuming more of this item will have no further effect.]

Nice, this was the last one! As expected, the Skin Strengthening Elixir increased my constitution and charm by 12 each. Looking at myself in the mirror, I noticed that my skin was much smoother and cleaner than before. Even I thought I looked good. I felt how important having good skin was.

“Are you close to completely conquering the 25th floor?”

“Yes, there's only one equipment part I didn't get. I hope it appears next time, and not some other part or Skin Strengthening Elixir.”

I used another Party Member Scarecrow as I answered Loretta. Nodding her head, Loretta calmly replied.



“In that case Shin-nim, I’ll see you after your next raid. Don’t forget to visit me afterwards.”

“Understood.”

After casually answering Loretta, I turned my back from her. I could hear her letting out a light sigh from behind, but I didn’t look back. Who knew if she’d try to sell something to me again?

“Guoooooooo!”

“All of you, come at me!”

[You used the skill, Provoke! You draw nearby enemies towards you!]

Giant Ghoul’s solo raid was extremely simple. First, I just had to repeatedly use Provoke to gather the zombies towards me. Then, I didn’t even need to use Elemental Tempest, as just a few normal Tempests were enough to completely wipe out most of the zombies, opening a path to the Giant Ghoul.

“Tempest! Tempest!”

“Humaaan...”

“Back... to... darkness...”

As zombies continued rising from the ground, I just ignored them after I opened up the path. I ran towards the Giant Ghoul, at the same time the Giant Ghoul ran towards me, enraged by the fact that I killed so many zombies.

“GUOOOOOOO!”

“Huu, haap!”

Raids in real life were good, but the dungeon’s raids also had their charm. Being able to fight against opponents this strong and feeling myself getting stronger in the process, there was no better feeling!

“Haa!”

I leaped up diagonally and extended Black Earthen Spear’s reach with my mana. Slashing through the back of Giant Ghoul’s hand, I lightly landed while breaking a few tombstones on my way. With luck, the Giant Ghoul was immediately poisoned. Blood was flowing down from his mouth. I loved Black Earthen Spear’s poison. Not only did it deal continuous damage over time, it also slowed the enemy’s movements and made him more vulnerable to fatal attacks.

“GUOOOOOOO, HUMAAAAAN!”

“I swear, I’ll change my race one day. Then I won’t have to listen to that line again... Haat!”

The Giant Ghoul reached toward me on all fours. Dodging his steel claws, I swung my spear at his face and shot out a Thunder Bomb. After my Spirit Mastery became mid-ranked, it became easier to use Peika’s elemental magic while maintaining Spirit Aura state.

“KUOOOOO!”

“Being sturdy is your strong point! Come on, be more aggressive!”

Floor Master battles were so difficult because of the bosses’ cheat-like skills, strong attacks, and boundless health and defense. In other words, if you could avoid their attacks and pierce through their defense and deal damage, you could easily kill the Floor Master alone.

Of course, most people would not even have a chance as they would be kicked out after taking a blow. The Floor Masters’ attacks had a wide reach and could easily be fatal to anyone that was hit. To shave down their boundless health while fighting them alone, the challenger would need to stay tense and alert the entire fight.

## Chapter 63. Draconian Lin (1)

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The Giant Ghoul was big even among Floor Masters. His claws were imbued with a mana of death, and when he rampaged, you took mild damage just from being in contact with the ground. Not to mention, he endlessly spawned hordes of zombies, forcing you to stay wary at all times.

However, I could already easily dodge its attacks, had immense attack power, and had defensive power that mere zombies could not break through. When I obtained a certain skill on top of all that, the Giant Ghoul raid simply became too easy.

It was the reward I received from solo clearing the Giant Ghoul raid.

[Death Counter (passive) – You will not get intimidated against the undead. Against the undead, all attack skills become 50 percent stronger and you cannot become an undead. This skill has no skill level.]

I found it quite ironic that a skill perfect for fighting against the undead only appeared after defeating the Giant Ghoul solo, but there wasn't much I could do about it.

The part about not being intimidated by the undead was a strong effect. It was only after I obtained the skill that I realized my attacks were unnatural when fighting the undead compared to when I was fighting other monsters. Not only were my attacks

unnatural, my defensive or evasive maneuvers all had strange, unnecessary movements mixed into them.

When I asked Loretta about it, she said living beings instinctively became weaker in face of the undead, who defied death and desired the living. I felt that skills really were amazing, being able to defy something instinctive.

Plus, the 50 percent attack boost when using attack skills was the main charm.

“GUOOOO!”

“I’ll return you to hell soon!”

I slowly disabled the Giant Ghoul. When a target was this big, it was best to gradually make parts of its body incapable of fighting. First, I worked on the Giant Ghoul’s left arm. Starting from the back of the hand to the wrist, forearm, and shoulder, I precisely pierced target locations with my spear. The Giant Ghoul then became unable to move his arm.

“Haaaap!”

I then continued to his left leg. It only took about 10 minutes to completely render half of his body useless. At this point, the Giant Ghoul began to look for zombies to consume in order to recover his injuries. The problem was that since he could only use half of his body, only his right hand could help him in this task. The Giant

Ghoul was truly too predictable!

The Giant Ghoul quickly dragged his body to where the zombies were. Before he could grab any, I shot a Tempest forward.

“Kuooooo!”

“And take this!”

When the Giant Ghoul missed his targets and let out an annoyed roar, I shot forward and stabbed my Black Earthen Spear into its right forearm. Then, I exploded my Spirit Aura.

[Critical Hit!]

“KUAAAAAAA!”

“Perfect.”

The Giant Ghoul screamed and tried to shake me off of his right arm. Before I could fall on the ground, I pulled out my Black Earthen Spear and jumped off. I had grown too used to fighting large monsters lately. I found myself getting on and off their bodies with familiarity.

“What are you going to do now without your arms? Want to try

using your mouth directly?”

“KIAAAAAA!”

It went without saying that he tried to do exactly that. However, his target was no longer the zombies, but me. As if to devour me along with all the zombies slowly approaching me, the Giant Ghoul opened his mouth wide and shot forward. This was also the moment I was waiting for.

“Eat this! Heroic Strike!”

I threw my Black Earthen Spear imbued with a generous amount of Spirit Aura. It shot forward like lightning and accurately hit the Giant Ghoul’s face, piercing through his skull. The Giant Ghoul’s head exploded, scattering rotten blood and other substances into the air. With his defense being so easily broken, I didn’t understand all the complaining other explorers did about it having impenetrable skin.

The Giant Ghoul eked out a cry with its possibly broken vocal cords as it thrashed about. His health was likely reaching its bottom. He would soon use Diehard and try to recover his health and restore his injuries.

Of course, I wouldn’t just sit still and let it happen! I took out my Silver Spear and aimed at his heart.

“Here’s another one! Divine Speed, Heroic Strike!”

The Silver Spear combined with Spirit Aura and let out a dazzling light. In truth, I thought that the Silver Spear looked cooler than the Black Earthen Spear. Thinking rather useless things while Divine Speed’s time was ticking, I shot the Silver Spear toward the heart of the Giant Ghoul, who had just used Diehard and was in the process of recovering.

[Critical Hit!]

“Gu...oooooooooooo....!”

Of course, my attack hit its target perfectly. The Silver Spear pierced the Giant Ghoul’s heart, which was strangely pumping out cold, rotten blood, and exploded it. After finding out Diehard activated using the heart as its basis, I always killed the Giant Ghoul without giving it time to complete Diehard.

[You obtained 30,000 gold.]

[Rewards will be distributed in order of contribution.]

[Kang Shin-nim’s contribution is the highest. Choose your reward.]

[1. Skin Strengthening Elixir



## 2. Giant Ghoul's Shirt]

Seeing the Giant Ghoul's Shirt on the reward list, I let out a sigh of relief. When I used a Party Member Scarecrow, the dungeon didn't consider the fight as a solo raid. As such, neither the special equipment piece nor the 'Death Counter Magic Book' dropped. There were two normal rewards to choose from, one of which was the Giant Ghoul's Shirt I had been waiting for.

In truth, I didn't know what material the Giant Ghoul Set was made out of, and I didn't want to wear them because they felt dirty. Even so, I had to equip them once to confirm the set skill. With a frown, I equipped the Giant Ghoul Set.

[You equipped the Giant Ghoul Set. Your strength and dexterity increase by 12. When the Giant Ghoul Set is equipped, you can use 'Diehard' once per day.]

As expected, Diehard was the skill I received. I quickly stored it in my pocket watch's 5 o'clock position and threw off the Giant Ghoul Set. Then, I closely examined Diehard's skill description.

[Diehard: usable once per day. Automatically activates when HP falls below 3 percent, restoring all injuries and filling up your HP to 50 percent of its maximum.]

“Ama...”

Amazing! This skill! What a cheat! As long as I didn't die in a single hit, I could recover up to 50 percent of my max HP even from 1 percent HP. Realizing once again that all Floor Masters' skills were cheats, I rubbed the pocket watch on my cheek. I couldn't be reckless just because I got this skill, but I could at least be more daring in the way I moved. Just that fact made this skill valuable!

Just like that, I obtained the skill that would later give me the name 'Undying Crown Prince.'

[Name: Kang Shin Race: Human Sex: Male

Class: Elementalist (Sub – Skill Collector) Title: Giant Ghoul Slayer Rank: Silver 7

Level: 26

HP – 10,120/10,120 MP – 6,230/6,230

Strength – 80(+35) Dexterity – 74(+21) Constitution – 78(+28)

Intelligence – 20(+11) Magic – 79(+11) Charm – 57(+11) Luck – 21(+11)

Normal Skill – High-rank Martial Arts (Lv 2), High-rank Spear Technique (Lv 5), Mid-rank Heroic Strike (Lv 4), Mid-rank Provoke (Lv 3), Divine Speed (Lv 3), Return (Lv 1), Low-rank Dash (Lv 9), Peruta Circuit (Lv 4), Deific Manifestation, Death Counter

Class Skill – Mid-rank Spirit Mastery (Lv 1), Low-rank Spirit Aura (Lv 8), Low-rank Elemental Control (Lv 8), Low-rank Elemental Contract (Lv 8), Low-rank Elemental Tempest (Lv 9), Thunder Beast (Lv 2)

Subclass Skill – Endow Skill, Spirit of the Collector]

[Equipment:

Power Earrings (Strength +2)

Flesh Golem's Second Finger (Strength +7, Constitution +7)

Lizard Knight Set (Strength +10, Dexterity +10)

Arachne's Black Earthen Spear (Strength +5, Dexterity +10, Poison damage on all basic attacks, inflicts poison status effect.)]

[Collector's Pocket Watch:

1 o'clock: Orc Lord's Warcry

2 o'clock: Vengeful Spirit's Wail

3 o'clock: Dark Thunder Explosion

4 o'clock: Dragon Skin

5 o'clock: Diehard]

[2 Event Dungeon clears, 1 Event Raid clear, accumulated bonus stats: 3]

[Current skill points: 10]

[Six title-effects: (Orc Lord Slayer, Wraith Queen Slayer, Dark Ratman Slayer, Giant Ghoul Slayer, Lizard Knight Master, Hermes). Accumulated effects: All stats +11, 15% speed increase, increased affinity to all elements, affinity to wind element greatly increased, can summon Talaria once per day.]

With an extremely satisfied expression, I headed towards

Loretta, who greeted me with a smile.

“Looks like you got it, Shin-nim.”

“Yep. It was a much better skill than I expected... I’m looking forward to the future.”

“Huhu, seeing you get stronger makes me all happy. Good luck going forward as well.”

“M-Mmm, thanks.”

Eh...? Didn’t she seem closer just now? When I tilted my head and pondered, Loretta interrupted like a thunderbolt from a clear sky.

“It looks like we won’t meet at the Floor Shop for a while.”

“What!? Why?”

“It’s my resting period, one that lasts for 1 year every 100 years. I’m operating countless Floor Shops with my consciousness split into puppets. I sometimes need rest too, don’t you think?”

“Ah, yes. Mm, I’ll miss you.”

“... You really will miss me?”

Loretta suddenly put her face close to mine and blinked. Although I was a little flustered, I answered her honestly.

“Of course, I’ve always been with Loretta. I had fun these past 5 years and even received a lot of help.”

“Will you miss me that much?”

“Well, of course... uuu, how embarrassing.”

“Don’t worry, Shin-nim... I’m embarrassed too.”

With that, Loretta smiled bashfully. For an instant, I fell into a trance at her beautiful expression, and had to make an active effort to snap myself out of my daze. Then, Loretta put her hands in her shop apron pocket and took something out after rummaging through.

“Since you say that, this here is perfect for customer!”

“Ek! Are you selling something again in this timing?”

“Ah! Erm, well... I-It’s not being sold.”

Loretta shrunk back after shouting out full of spirit. She wasn’t selling it? I looked at the object in her hand. It was a light blue crystal shaped like a small key. It was a truly elaborate and

beautiful key.

“What’s this?”

“Um, you know, Shin-nim. Shin-nim will become the owner of a mansion called Marianne’s Garden.”

“Ah, I remember from last time. You said Marianne’s Garden was the only Special Mansion without an owner.”

Loretta nodded her head silently and seriously.

“Special Mansions aren’t something you can buy with money. They’re a sort of special reward given out to explorers who made important achievements in the dungeon. When people realize Shin-nim is the owner of Marianne’s Garden, all other dungeon explorers will come to look at Shin-nim with admiration. Ah, not that I think someone would go out of their way make trouble, but it’s best that you don’t go around telling everyone you meet that you’re an owner of a Special Mansion. Claim it silently and enter it silently. The Residential Area has marketplaces and even adult entertainment districts, but residents have to use a special method to enter their houses. Unless they reveal where they live and lead others to it, no one can find out.”

“That makes me even more curious.”

“You’ll receive something that looks like this key. You can use it to enter Marianne’s Garden.”

“I see. Then what about this key?”

Loretta became silent. Her cheeks flushed red.

“J-Just like its name suggests, Marianne’s Garden comes with a beautiful garden. In the center of that garden, there is a spring called Fairy Spring. It’s not only Marianne’s Garden. Other Special Mansions also have special devices like the Fairy Spring. This key reacts to those devices and operates.”

“Operates?”

“You’ll find out when you bring this key to Fairy Spring. T-Take it as a goodbye present!”

Loretta handed the crystal key to me. As I accepted it, I tilted my head. Operates? Will a giant robot pop out from the spring or something? Or will a door to a new world open? Although I wanted to ask Loretta, it didn’t look like she would answer.

“M-Make sure you do it. Okay, Shin-nim?”

“I, I got it. I got it so don’t look at me with those teary eyes.”

Loretta was a bit strange today. When I looked at her, I felt stuffy and my heart pounded faster. I felt a bit hot, but I didn’t think anything was different than usual. Did I catch a cold?



“T-Then you should head up. I also have to get ready and scrap the puppets.”

“I understand. Thank you for everything until now, Loretta. I’ll see you in a year.”

“... It... might not take a full year.”

“Really? That’d be great!”

When I gave her my wholehearted smile, Loretta smiled wholeheartedly in return. It was a beautiful smile without a single blemish. She then said.

“How about you buy 100 bottles of Holy Water to say goodbye? If you buy all 100 bottles now, I’ll give you a one-time 15% discount! That’s only 1,275 gold!”

“The 26th floor is undead too, huh...”

With that, I parted with Loretta. Because I felt like I lost a friend of 5 years, I felt extremely sad. Of course, at this point, I did not know where and how I would come to reunite with her.

## Chapter 64. Draconian Lin (2)

---

When someone heard the word ‘undead,’ what were the monsters people would usually think of? Right, first were the zombies. The wraiths that appeared on the dungeon’s 6th floor also counted as undead.

The ones people would think of second were of course...

“Human.”

“Human with juicy ribs.”

“Splint bone is mine.”

“Screw off, I can’t even make beef bone soup with you guys!”

Skeletons. They were undead creatures without a single bit of flesh and were made of white or black bones.

[Lightning doesn’t work well on bones, Master...]

“Don’t be sad, Peika. We just have to thoroughly crush them to make up for it.”

Using my spear like a club, I shattered the incoming skeletons. They were much tougher and had much stronger attacks compared to the zombies or the ghouls. Even so, they were much weaker

than me. Their attacks were only strong to the point that they could scratch my armor if I just let them freely attack. In other words, they could just barely break through my defense to deal a tiny bit of damage. Of course, they were embarrassingly weak.

However, their defensive power was quite good, and they were more troublesome than zombies or ghouls in terms of their regenerative powers. If I broke them without pouring mana into my spear, they regenerated, so I had to go through the trouble of destroying them with my spear imbued with a mix of lightning elemental power and mana.

Although they didn't smell as bad without rotting flesh, they were still extremely dirty and annoying to deal with. Just the way they moved irked me. For mere skeletons, they moved with dance steps as they tried to attack me with their swords. It really wanted to make me crush them.

Plus, these guys loved bones too much!

“His skull looks good.”

“I like his third cervical vertebrae.”

Every time they saw me, they charged towards me as they complimented my bone structure. I wondered if this floor was designed to irritate me. Perhaps it was a common feature of undead-type monsters, but their attainment in martial arts was pitifully low. I simply put one spear in each hand and flowed Spirit Aura into them to use them as electric beating clubs. Just like that,

I crushed the skeletons' skulls as I made my way forward.

“T-The bones I spent my entire life polishing up...!”

“He breaks skulls...!”

“S-Skull Breaker!”

“Run away, it's the Skull Breaker!”

“Shut it!”

These guys! For monsters without brains, they sure were smarter than the zombies! I should've known when they said something like third cervical vertebrae!

[Thunder Bomb!]

“It's the Skull Breaker!!!”

“The Skull Breaker is coming!”

“Now you're calling me Skull Breaker no matter where I attack you...”

They called me Skull Breaker when I broke their ribs. They called me Skull Breaker when I crushed their arms. I didn't understand.

I couldn't just charge forward like I did in the 21st floor. Thus, I took a fast-walking pace, swinging my two spears and shooting out Thunder Bombs until I reached the 26th floor. The time it took to accomplish that was about 7 hours. After confirming that my level had gone up to level 27 and confirming that there were no more skeletons nearby, I put away the spears and sighed.

“Loretta, I'm he... Ah.”

On the 26th Floor Shop, I couldn't find Loretta. Instead, there was a young man resting his chin on the shop desk as he smoked a cigarette. Discovering me, he looked around and muttered as he chewed on his cigarette.

“Eh? ... Oh, right. It was from today. Welcome.”

“Hello, are you Loretta's replacement?”

“Hm, you really do look like [noonim](#)'s taste... What, a Hero? Noonim's quite skilled.”

Noonim is a more formal version of noona.

The young man glanced over me with sparkling crimson eyes. Although he sounded mumbly as he was still chewing on his cigarette, his voice was still extremely pleasant to listen to. He had snow-white skin and was pretty enough to be mistaken for a girl. However, there was something else that caught my attention.

“Um... on your head... there are horns.”

“Yea, I’m a Draconian.”

After answering me casually, he puffed out the cigarette smoke. Then, he put the cigarette back in his mouth. Don’t tell me he thought that was enough of an explanation? Dumbfounded, I stared at him smoking his cigarette.

His hair was black just like mine. However, his hair was extremely long, which was tied at the top of his head in a ponytail. On each of his temples, a curly silver horn was protruding out, forming a symmetry. Finally, his eyes were a bit dirty.

He had a black garment draped over his body, which didn’t seem to have any muscles. I then noticed the area behind his butt, where a scaled tail dozens of times larger than a lizard’s tail swayed gently. It was then that I remembered something.

“Um, are you perhaps a beastman?”

“Beastman? Mmm... no. Beastmen are beings blessed by God to take animals’ traits. On the other hand, Draconians get their traits from their draconic bloodline.”

“Dragons?”

“Ah, that’s all you need to know. It’s nothing important.”

He seemed too lazy to explain further as he waved the smoke away with his hands. Although there was a mountain load of questions I wanted to ask, I decided to just let it go. However, he seemed to have his own questions. After finishing his cigarette, he glanced at me and asked.

“So, you’re Kang Shin, right? Earth’s Hero.”

“I don’t really like being called Hero.”

“Really? Mm, then just Kang Shin. Know this. Noonim pestered me quite a bit to take good care of you.”

“She pestered you?”

“Loretta noonim was in charge of almost 4,000 explorers. Don’t think my real body will be at all those places.”

“Oh, so you aren’t a puppet, but the real one?”

“What, she even told you about the puppets? ...She fell deep, that person.”

What did he mean Loretta fell deep? This new Floor Shop owner was unfriendly and liked to talk to himself. When I was already starting to miss Loretta, he blurted out as if he had just remembered something.

“Lin. You can call me Lin.”

“Okay, Lin. Take good care of me for a while.”

“Mm, yeah. I’m curious as to how many floors you can climb during this one year. According to noonim, you’re a real one that hasn’t been seen for a while. I can expect at least five floors, right?”

He glanced over me with narrow eyes as he spoke arrogantly. Oh, you’re provoking me? I, Kang Shin, manliest of men, will take on that challenge.

“Lin, do you like betting?”

“Kukuku, I love it.”

Lin and I exchanged smiles. As expected of Loretta’s replacement. He was walking the same path Loretta once walked! I had to rein in my laughter from bursting out. Lin, on the other hand, was looking at me like I was a naïve child. I was already looking forward to the day his expression would change.

“Kang Shin, let’s decide on our bet. There’s what noonim said, so I doubt you won’t make it to the 30th floor in 1 year. Right, if you defeat the 35th Floor Master by yourself within one year, I will make a gauntlet suitable for you. If you even defeat the 40th Floor Master by yourself within one year, I will make you a weapon that



contains my essence.”

“Lin, you’re a blacksmith?”

“Yep. I’m the Red Dragon’s descendent, so I have close affinity to fire. In any case, if you can’t break through the 35th floor within one year, I will take the pocket watch back from you. Along with your subclass of course. I’ll also take away the pocket watch if you party with other people to clear the 35th Floor Master, though, I doubt you have many skills in there anyways.”

I already had five. Not that I’d tell him, of course.

“Is it possible to take away someone’s class?”

“I wouldn’t have said it otherwise. Though, not anyone can do it.”

Indeed, it was a scary penalty. The pocket watch was a treasure that made up quite a bit of my overall strength. That said, this person was too soft. Did he think I couldn’t climb 14 floors in one year? I asked with a bashful smile.

“Then, what if I break through the 40th floor even earlier?”

“What? Earlier than 1 year? Puhat.”

The Draconian snorted.

“There’s no record of such a thing happening. Don’t look down on the 40th Floor Master. He forced countless First Dungeon challengers to their knees. The legend says that he’s even stronger than the 45th Floor Master. You think you can reach the 40th floor and defeat him within one year? Don’t kid.”

“But a man should dream big. If there’s a bigger reward, wouldn’t I be more motivated to try?”

“... You aren’t wrong. Right, explorers these days really lack that sort of attitude. Hmm.”

Lin started a second cigarette. He didn’t take out a lighter, but the cigarette was set on fire on its own. It seemed the power of the Red Dragon was used to set cigarettes on fire. While I nodded my head in appreciation of gaining new knowledge, Lin murmured with the cigarette in his mouth.

“If you can do it within 9 months, I’ll make you a helmet along with the weapon. If you do it within 8 months, I’ll add in the gauntlet. 7 months, I’ll add in boots.”

“Ah, I already have boots to wear though.”

“If you manage to succeed, you can give me your boots. I’ll do some work on them.”

“Ah, got it.”

“Finally, though I think it’s completely impossible, if you succeed within 6 months... ha, I can’t even say it with a straight face. Anyways, if you succeed in breaking through the 40th floor within 6 months, I’ll make you a full plate armor set. Along with a weapon, of course.”

“Wow, you really are generous.”

“Puhahahahaha! Climbing 14 floors in half a year, I think you’re a lot more generous than I am! Ku, kukukuk! I know you’re a Hero, but [your liver is so big that it’s hanging outside your belly](#)! Agh, my sides! I understand a little bit why Loretta noonim likes you so much!”

Korean proverb meaning you’ve got a lot of nerve.

“Ek, but I’m into women...”

“I’m into women too, you bastard.”

Because he suddenly emphasized his words with sharp eyes, I flinched a little.

“Well, do your best, Kang Shin. Don’t give up in the middle. I hate people that give up the most.”

“What a coincidence.”

After getting ample rest, I stretched and loosened my body. Holding up my Black Earthen Spear, I shouted at Lin as I took a step on the stair to the 27th floor.

“I hate giving up the most too.”

## Chapter 65. Draconian Lin (3)

---

About five hours after that, I was pouring Holy Water over my Silver Spear and Black Earthen Spear, humming happily in front of the '27th' Floor Shop. To cover the spear all the way to the spear handle, it took five bottles of Holy Water per spear. Even so, once finished, the spears would deal bonus damage to undead monsters for a full day.

Plus, I felt like I wouldn't drop my equipment even if I died. Though, dying in the dungeon didn't drop your equipment anyways!

Lin was looking at me with a wry expression.

"You bugged bastard...!"

"I'm happy. I was even faster than when I broke through the 26th floor. Bets really encourage people to try harder."

"Let's cancel that."

"A man's words are worth a thousand gold!"

"Kuk... Then let's make the time limit shorter! Half a year!"

"Fine, but you have to make the rewards better."

“C-Cape. I’ll even make a cape made from my ancestor’s leather! But if you want to obtain that too, you’ll have to do it within 3 months! 3 months, understand!?”

“Call!”

[Your quest has been renewed.]

A cape made out of dragon leather? My eyes sparkled as I agreed to his new terms. Since I planned to break through past the 40th floor within 6 months, I wouldn’t lose out on anything. If I succeeded within 3 months, I would obtain an even greater treasure. Now that things had come to this, I had to try even harder!

“Then I’m going to run a bit faster!”

“What, how have you been running until now!?”

“But I wonder, why didn’t I get a title for clearing the 26th floor quickly? ...Was it because I already have Hermes...?”

“H-Hermes!? You bastard, you even have a god’s true name! Uk, my back!”

Though a bit ridiculous, the skeletons’ classes became a bit more diverse from the 28th floor on. There were the skeleton warriors

who attacked with swords or iron maces, skeleton archers who shot out arrows made of bones, and the skeleton magicians who incessantly shot out trivial and annoying magic attacks. Without Peika, it would have been impossible.

“Gelgel, make sure not to hurt his bones!”

“I’ll shoot arrows!”

I pierced my spear through the wrist of a skeleton striking down at me with its iron mace. The skeleton then dropped its iron mace along with its wrist. I grabbed it by its skull and threw it at the skeleton archer. When they collided, they both shattered. The other skeletons flinched upon seeing it, and began to back away.

“S-Skull Breaker!”

“It’s the Skull Breaker!”

“How do you guys even know about that!? Tempest!”

“Kiaaaaa! Skull Breakeeeeeer!”

After being swept up by Tempest, the skeletons all shattered together, creating a pleasant clicking sound. With the 50 percent attack power boost from Death Counter, just a single Tempest was enough to destroy the skeletons.

[I broke all the skeletons trying to use magic!]

“Good job, Peika. Then let’s run!”

[Okay!]

While Peika soared through the air, taking care of magic using skeletons with Thunder Bombs and Thunder Spears, I cleanly took care of the skeleton warriors in front of me as I ran.

At first, I used and maintained Spirit Aura, but I soon realized it was unnecessary. It was better to let Peika to do her own thing.

“Peika, 11 o’clock, skeleton magicians!”

[Thunder Bomb!]

I circulated Peruta circuit as I ran and always had Mana Potions in my mouth to make up for the huge drain on my mana. In my hands were my two spears, which I swung around like baseball bats. I may have seemed a bit unsightly, but I didn’t care.

Although I thought drinking Mana Potions was wasting money, upon thinking about it, I realized it was the same thing as investing money to raise my skill proficiency. After I realized that, I no longer hesitated to use them.

In truth, I was overflowing with gold. I didn’t need to use gold



outside of purchasing Floor Master Battle Tickets and Party Member Scarecrows. Thus, I started buying Mana Potions. I didn't need Health Potions. While going through normal floors, I had never been gravely injured.

When I was just about to break through the 28th floor, messages that always made me happy rang out.

[Mid-rank Spirit Mastery becomes level 2! Your eyesight for souls strengthens and you will gain a favorable impression from spiritual beings more easily.]

[Low-rank Spirit Aura becomes level 9! You can more strongly draw out elementals' potential.]

[Low-rank Elemental Control becomes level 9! Elementals will more actively listen to your plea for help.]

[Low-rank Elemental Contract becomes level 9! You can feel your soul's container growing more mature. The bond of contract to your elemental becomes firmer.]

“Oh, oooh!”

[I got a little stronger again!]

Peika and I both yelled out in happiness. Soon, my skills as an

Elementalist would reach mid-rank! I was starting to worry because my Elementalist skills were much lower-ranked than my Spear Technique skill and Martial Arts skill, but it seems my worry was for nothing. Once the skills became mid-rank, I would be able to grow much stronger. Once I obtained mid-rank Elemental Contract, not only would Peika's strength grow, but I could also form a contract with another elemental.

Lin was watching me with rotten eyes.

“Three and a half hours... crazy.”

“See you later!”

Just like always, I put 2 points into strength and dexterity, and 1 into constitution. Then, I ran up to the 29th floor. Update? It was a waste of time to wait around for my body to finish updating. That was something that would automatically happen as I fought!

“Skull Breaker!”

“Skull Breaker crushes us skeletons.”

“We will crush your spine and make you unable to move.”

“Stop his advance!”

The skeletons on the 29th floor wore a few pieces of armor. There

were also some skeletons mixed in that weren't wearing any armor. Regardless, the moment I yelled 'Commence Exploration' on the 29th floor, the skeletons had me surrounded, as if they were waiting for me to appear.

I knew instinctively that I couldn't kill them with Tempest. Although just one or two might have been fine, what I saw seemed to be the 29th floor's elite skeletons, as they wore proper armor and carried swords and shields.

They slowly tightened the encirclement, and I pondered as I took a step back. How was something like this possible? These guys really were much more intelligent than the zombies. Plus, I could feel a strong presence from behind them. It seemed there was a named monster controlling them.

Taking another step back, I put a Mana Potion in my mouth. Then, I shouted while thrusting forward with my Black Earthen Spear.

“Elemental Tempest!”

[FIRST!]

[Hurry, hurry!]

[Spin~]

[Kugagaga! Let's go break skeletons!]

In front of the armored skeletons approaching me, my spear enveloped by an elemental storm exploded.

“Kueeeek!”

“My bones!”

“Too strong!”

“Huu, skill to win is the best.”

Even the armored skeletons could not withstand my Elemental Tempest, which was made using 50 percent of my mana, and shattered. It was then that my field of view finally cleared up. The ordinary skeletons warriors that were on standby behind the frontline forces yelled with flustered voices.

“General!”

“General died!”

“They were generals? Tempest!”

Since I cleared out the skeletons equipped with armor and shields, I could use Tempest to take care of the rest. These bastards dared to make a defensive formation? I felt satisfied now that the skeletons encircling me with their shields were taken care of.

“Peika!”

[Got it! Chain Lightning!]

Although their boney bodies were supposed to be strong against lightning, they didn't seem strong enough to handle Peika's Chain Lightning. One by one, the encircling skeletons fell from the lightning that started from Peika's finger.

However, Chain Lightning, that was spreading like fire on a wheat field, suddenly disappeared. Although most of the skeletons had already died, it was an abrupt end, given how rapidly it had been spreading.

[Kuaaa...!]

The one who swung his sword to interrupt Chain Lightning stared at me fixedly. He was at least 2.3 meters tall and was twice as big as me.

[Destroy... Skull Breaker.]

A deep imposing voice. He was undoubtedly the instigator who had gathered up the skeletons into a battle formation from the start of the 29th floor! Two will-o-wisps blazed in its eyes. Unlike the weakling skeletons, he wore a full set of armor. On one hand was a shield, and on the other was a large sword made of bones. I gulped down a mouthful of saliva and asked.

“Are you the skeleton knight? The one who’s said to be the strongest among skeletons?”

[I am a skeleton champion.]

“Ah, never mind then.”

I got nervous for nothing! He was just a weakling after all.

[Skull Breaker, I will kill you!]

“Ha, you?”

[Uoooooooooooooh!]

Just like that, I successfully provoked the skeleton champion without even using the Provoke skill. The two will-o-wisps in his eyes showed his rage by burning even more fiercely. At the same time, he charged towards me.

He lightly leaped off the ground and struck down at me with his bone sword.

I dodged his attack and made him stumble backwards by tackling the part of his body unprotected by his shield. As I had even used Skin Strengthening Elixirs to strengthen my constitution, my HP didn’t decrease for just tackling a named monster’s body. Even I

had to admit that my body was incredibly tough.

[Kuk!]

“Your lower body is weak! That’s why just tackling can make you fall!”

As I gave him advice, I stabbed my spear into his head consecutively. After allowing three strong blows to hit him, he got up. By then, there was already a huge crack in his helmet.

[As expected of Skull Breaker! However, I, Etos, will not lose!]

“Don’t call me Skull Breaker!”

Also, a mere undead shouldn’t appeal his name! A named monster had a name, of course, but I didn’t know what I was supposed to do with it. If he wanted me to write his name down on a notebook and kill him, he visited the wrong series!

[If you defeat me, I will acknowledge you as a true Skull Breaker!]

“I don’t need you to acknowledge that!”

Annoyed, I once again performed consecutive stabs. Surprisingly, he seemed to have predicted when I would stab forward, as he jumped back and dodged my attack. Then he kicked a stone on the ground and aimed it towards me. The stone itself was crushed by

Peika, but his style of fighting still made me tilt my head.

“Did he learn how to dodge my attacks after being hit before? This guy might be pretty useful!”

[Useful?]

“Too bad he’s an undead... Sorry, Etos. If you reincarnate, come visit our dojo. I’ll give you a 20 percent discount.”

[Stop saying things I can’t understand, Skull Breaker!]

Etos shouted furiously and charged at me once more. His bone sword cut through the air with a bone-chilling sound, clearly aiming for my neck. Mm, it was the clearest attack out of all the monsters I had faced recently. However, his defense was still lacking!

‘Use your shield to hold off your opponent! Is your shield just for looks!?’

I dug into his embrace using the gap he left wide open and thrust out my spear.

“Divine Speed, Heroic Strike!”

[Kuaaaak!]



Of course, my Heroic Strike boosted by Divine Speed easily shattered his cracked helmet and destroyed his skull. Poor Etos died without even a chance to leave behind a final word.

[You defeated the named monster, 'Etos.' You obtained a Residential Area Entrance Ticket as reward.]

[You obtained the title, 'Skull Breaker!' When fighting skeleton-type undead, your critical hit chance doubles and you can more quickly intimidate your enemy. Your critical damage increases by 50 percent when fighting all enemies with bones.]

“I really became a Skull Breaker, the hell... Not to mention, for a title using the word ‘skull,’ it’s specialized in breaking bones...”

Blaming Etos, I looked at the surrounding skeletons. The skeletons that were encircling me from before I even fought Etos trembled and started to back away.

“S-Skull Breaker.”

“My skull will get broken.”

“Run!”

“But we can’t run from Skull Breaker!”

Was this the intimidation effect? Just my existence could intimidate monsters. It was quite fun. Wait, with this, wouldn't it be a piece of cake to break through the dungeon? With a smirk, I fixed my grip on my spear.

In truth, I really wanted to visit the Residential Area, but since I was under a 3 month time restraint, I wouldn't be able to fully enjoy myself even if I went. I decided to think about it after I broke through the 30th floor.

What I had to worry about right now was the Red Dragon Cape... I mean, fast dungeon breakthroughs!

## Chapter 66. Draconian Lin (4)

---

[I succeeded in breaking through the 25th floor by myself.]

“Oh, that was fast!”

[It was all thanks to your training and the Muscle Strengthening Elixirs.]

I was in the middle of dashing through the 30th floor pathway when Ren contacted me. While completely crushing the skeleton warriors that were running at me, I answered Ren.

“There really weren’t a lot of people on the 25th floor. If you’re having trouble finding party members, ask the Floor Shop owner for an item called Party Member Scarecrow. You can start grinding with them.”

[Eh? I’m not doing it with Crown Prince?]

“I already finished grinding.”

[Kuk, so fast... as expected of my master.]

“Ren is fast too. The Giant Ghoul was easy, right?”

[If there’s one thing I learned from sparring with you, it’s dodging attacks. I can somehow dodge the zombies’ attacks or the

Giant Ghoul's claws, but... his Diehard skill annoys me greatly. Because of it, I had to spend 5 hours to defeat him.]

“If you blow up his heart while he's using the skill, he'll die.”

[Crown Prince is the only one who can do such a strange thing. Regardless, since I obtained the Death Counter skill, solo raids should be somewhat doable.]

While using Heroic Strike boosted by Divine Speed to take care of two named monsters, Skeleton Warmage and Skeleton Scout, I answered Ren.

“I really like Ren's attitude for these things. Good luck. Don't let something like the Giant Ghoul kill you.”

[Crown Prince is probably the only one who can call the 25th Floor Master as 'something like'...]

“Ah, but Ren can't store skills like I do. You'll have to choose between Diehard and Dragon Skin. I'll recommend Dragon Skin. The Giant Ghoul Set isn't something a person should wear.”

[Can I buy Crown Prince's pocket watch from somewhere?]

“You can try asking your Floor Shop owner.”

[I already did, but he only asked how I heard about such an

ancient artifact... That Loretta woman, just who is she?]

While cursing at the Skeleton Warmage for only dropping 5,000 gold and curiously examining the ‘Silverbone Crossbow’ the Skeleton Scout dropped, I answered Ren.

“A kind and pretty shop noona...?”

[She’s only kind to Crown Prince...]

Oh, this crossbow was pretty good! If there were crossbow bolts in my inventory, it reloaded automatically and shot out consecutively. Wasn’t this a machine gun!? For a completely plain looking crossbow other than the fact that it was made of silver bones, it sure had excellent functions. Oh! It even dealt bonus damage if the bolts were made from ground skeleton bones!

I had finally found a better use for the bones skeletons occasionally dropped other than selling them to Lin. Although it didn’t seem usable against boss monsters, it seemed useful for cleaning up trash mobs. I was greatly satisfied by the unexpected lucky drop.

“Regardless, good luck, Ren. We can raid together around the 50th floor.”

[There are people who can’t ever climb to that 50th floor!]

“Ren can do it.”

I retorted as I hung the crossbow by my waist.

“Because Ren is my disciple.”

[... That... are you acknowledging me?]

“To tell you the truth, I want to train you for at least a year more.”

[I won't be your disciple!]

“I'm kidding. You're doing great. Keep it up. Goodbye.”

[Ah, uh, wait!]

“What's up?”

As the skeletons kept running away because of my Skull Breaker title, I used Provoke to draw them towards me. I then used Tempest to destroy them while I asked Ren.

[Do... Do you know the name Lebuik Vandeon Granaris?]

“No, I don't.”

[... No, you see. I know it's impossible as well, but... I'm asking just in case.]

“Like I said, I don't know.”

[If you ever hear about Lebuik Vandeon Granaris... Do tell me. I beg you.]

Since Ren's voice was unusually tense, I also became serious as I answered him. As I saw the door to the 30th Floor Master up ahead, I became even more serious.

“Since I'm always climbing the dungeon by myself, I doubt I'll hear much of other people's names... but sure. I'll tell you if I hear about him.”

[Thank you.]

“I didn't know you were so concerned about the man who turned you into a dungeon explorer.”

[I'm not concerned! Crown Prince really has a dirty personality!]

In the past, Ren had mentioned it was Sir Lebuik who chose him to become a dungeon explorer among numerous other young talents. Since he couldn't forget about him, it seemed he was a special person to Ren.

“I’m a bit curious too. He was your first master, right? I wonder how strong he is.”

[Pft, I know fully well how competitive you are, but I doubt you will be his match. If Sir Lebuik is alive, he should at least be Gold rank... Ah.]

“... I’m in front of the 30th Floor Master door. I’ll talk to you later.”

[M-Mmm, I see. Then... I’ll talk to you later.]

I ended my conversation with Ren. Although I didn’t mean to, I felt like I had asked leading questions. Ren was the one at fault for being stupid, it wasn’t my fault.

Alright, now that I had rationalized it to myself, I should go into the boss fight. The 30th floor’s ‘first’ was already taken by someone else. Although it would have been safer to challenge the Floor Master with a full party of 10...

I now knew how much stronger I was compared to the other explorers. I was confident that I could handle the 30th Floor Master by myself, especially since I had my skills as an Elementalist and the pocket watch. Plus, since Lin had set his quest’s clear condition to breaking through the dungeon without party play, I couldn’t do so anyways.

“Fight me!”



With a spirited shout, I slammed opened the door. The Field was surprisingly a vast wilderness, where only a pale blue moon shone the dark night sky. In the area, which was much larger than the 25th floor's graveyard, about 200 or so skeletons were lined up. Each and every one of them wore a sturdy suit of armor and were armed with weapons. I could also see skeleton mages and skeleton archers amongst their ranks.

However, their straight-line formation broke down the moment I entered the Field.

“Kiik, it’s the Skull Breaker!”

“Don’t be intimidated, Captain will punish you!”

“S-Skull Breaker! We have nowhere to run!”

“Ah, what if we stay still and just leave it to Captain?”

“That’s it!”

[All of you shut up!]

A thundering voice rang out from the back, which straightened up the skeletons’ slackened discipline. When I laid my eyes on the owner of the voice, I was incredibly surprised. My god!

“A skeleton mount! I’m jealous!”

[It’s been a while since a challenger who knows his stuff appeared...]

The 30th Floor Master was a skeleton wearing full plate armor and carrying a large sword made of bones. As his armor covered his entire body and his helmet covered his face, his appearance was just like a knight’s. A huge knight over 2.5 meters in size. He spoke with a ghastly voice that seemed to flow out from the pit of hell.

[I am the Skeleton Knight. Remember my face. I am the one who will send you into endless despair.]

“Yeah, I really should remember the face of a coward who calls himself a knight but attempts to fight me with his army.”

[... Kill that bastard who’s full of talk!]

“Captain, we can’t!”

“I don’t know about Captain, but our bones will get crushed in a single hit!”

“Can we just tie up Captain and offer him? Then, we can surrender!”

“That’s it!”

[You bastards!]

The skeletons downfall was their overly high intelligence. They figured out the difference in our leagues and thought to surrender. It was the first time I had faced such monsters in the dungeon. The Skull Breaker title was more amazing than I ever imagined.

[Fight him. NOW!]

“Tsk, big talk for someone who’s going to stay hidden until the end.”

“This is why knights suck.”

“Ehew, let’s just go fight. Hey, if we’re going to die anyways, let’s not bother resisting. If Skull Breaker gets tired and loses to Captain, that would be infuriating!”

“That’s it!”

[I will murder you all!]

As all the skeletons were drowning in their sense of defeat, I attacked the mages and archers hidden in their midst.

“Peika, I’ll leave it to you!”

[I got it, Master! Thunder Arrow!]

With that, close to a hundred lightning arrows appeared in the sky. The skeletons that were looking at each other and talking all turned to face the arrows. In that instant, the lightning arrows soared through the sky.

“An Elementalist!”

“Kugagagagaga!”

“We didn’t even do anything yet!”

“Gigagagaga!”

[Not good enough!]

While the skeletons were panicking, only the Skeleton Knight protected himself by swinging his large sword. However, the lightning arrows he blocked were only to stop him from protecting his skeleton minions. It was a feint, per se.

While he was blocking the lightning arrows coming towards him, dozens of other lightning arrows completed their duty. The lightning arrows that were focused on the few mages and archers all pierced their targets and exploded them into pieces.

“Uguk! The magicians and archers were all killed!”

“Thank god I’m not an archer!”

“Ah, if we want to survive, we just have to arm Captain with a bow!”

“That’s... Kugak!”

The Skeleton Knight swung his sword and cut down a few of his skeleton minions. The wilderness that was full of the clicking sounds of their bones and their voices became completely silent for a moment.

[What are you doing with your enemy right in front of you, you fools!]

“Well said, Skeleton Knight. I was starting to get annoyed too.”

Agreeing with Skeleton Knight, I bent my knees and slightly pulled my body backwards. Instead of the Black Earthen Spear, I held my Silver Spear as I pulled my arm back. Peika went into the Silver Spear on her own accord.

“But... someone who cuts down his own soldiers annoys me even more!”

[Everyone charge! Crush him! Those that refuse will have their

bones crushed by my sword!]

“Gugelgel, follow Captain’s command.”

“We are only alive because of this cursed body. Let’s go set it ablaze.”

“Our lives already ended a long time ago. I want to put an end to my days, forced to live as a soldier even in death.”

I pulled my arms back as much as I could and concentrated my strength into it. The Silver Spear in my grip radiated a brilliant white light and flickered with lightning. My eyes were fixed, not at the skeletons running towards me, but the Skeleton Knight sitting on his skeleton mount.

[Block his attack! Destroy him!]

“Try it if you... can!”

The moment I finished my retort, I threw my spear forward with all the strength I could muster. Although I didn’t shout Heroic Strike or Divine Speed, both skills were undoubtedly activated. It was because the speed I threw my spear was unusually fast.

I remembered something similar happening in the past. If I was extremely focused, skills would be activated without saying it out loud!

## Chapter 67. Draconian Lin (5)

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“Kugagagaga!”

“Kak!”

The skeletons followed the Skeleton Knight’s command and attacked me. However, my spear had already left my hand, and the skeletons in its path could not even die meaningful deaths, as their blows scattered in all directions without slowing down the spear in the slightest.

Naturally, the Skeleton Knight didn’t have the time to dodge it. He hurriedly raised his sword, but the spear was already at his face. His sword bounced off into the air, while my spear pierced through his helmet perfectly and exploded with lightning.

[Critical Hit!]

[Kahak! Humaaaan!]

The Skeleton Knight let out a short scream. His helmet broke into pieces and his skeleton skull was revealed. The Silver Spear was still stuck in along the crack in his forehead as it flickered with lightning. Then, the will-o-wisps in the Skeleton Knight’s eyes burned more violently. He let out an enraged roar, pulling out the Silver Spear and slamming it down on the ground. He then shook his head vehemently and brushed off the pieces of his helmet. At

the same time, Peika came out of the Silver Spear and yelled angrily.

[Kyak! Treating a lady like this, you're the worst!]

“Peika, come back!”

[Okay!]

Gulping down a Middle Potion, I took out the Black Earthen Spear.

“You cowardly skeletons! Stop being scared and come fight me!”

[You used Provoke! ‘Almost’ all nearby enemies become hostile toward you!]

“Kugelgel... Kill Skull Breaker.”

“I’ll show him how hard my bones are.”

“Understanding danger and withdrawing is not cowardice, but bravery!”

While most of the reluctant skeletons started charging towards



me with hostility, there was one skeleton that threw out a wise saying as it backed away. Regardless, I used Tempest to take care of them all at once. The sound of dozens of skeletons shattering filled the area.

[Rise again and kill the enemy! Skeleton Rise!]

“Hey, when are you going to fight?”

[Kill him!]

That son of a bitch, he ignored me! Watching the skeletons rise back up like time had just gone backwards, I felt a headache coming. Unlike the zombies, the skeletons could deal damage to me. It meant that I couldn't just ignore them and go for the Skeleton Knight. In that case...

“Tempest!”

After using a few Tempests to make most of the skeletons incapable of battle, I kicked off the ground where I was standing and charged towards the Skeleton Knight. Shooting away the skeletons getting in the way with my spear, I arrived in front of the Skeleton Knight before he could chant another Skeleton Rise.

“Fight me one on one.”

[Rise again and... Kak!]

“I said, fight me one on one!”

This bastard, he shuts up when things get disadvantageous for him! I cut off the skeleton mount's legs, forcing it to kneel. I then stabbed out with my spear consecutively. The Skeleton Knight received my spears with his sword and shouted.

[Rise again and kill the... Kak!]

“Let's see how long you can chant for!”

Every time he swung his sword once, I stabbed with my spear three times. Once at the skeleton mount's head, once at the Skeleton Knight's sword, and once at his face! After some time, the skeleton mount, who was unable to withstand the flurry of attacks, scattered into pieces. The Skeleton Knight became speechless as he finally set his foot on the ground.

Of course, because of the over 60 cm difference in our height, I was like a little kid looking up at an adult.

[Rise again... Kuhuk!]

“I'm tired of hearing it, you son of a bitch!”

Even while he was chanting, he managed to block my Heroic Strike with his sword. Perhaps because it was a Floor Master's

weapon, there wasn't a single crack on his weapon. Even so, he had to take a few steps back from the vast force he had to withstand.

“Fine, just keep chanting!”

There was probably no one who deserved to get his knighthood revoked more than him! I gritted my teeth and assaulted the Skeleton Knight, who was irritating me from the very beginning. Unlike the 25th Floor Master, his skills had a certain depth to them. Even so, he couldn't win against me with his mindset!

[Critical Hit!]

[Critical Hit!]

[Critical Hit!]

[Kyak! You, Skull Breakeeeeeer!]

The Skeleton Knight's armor quickly began to crumble. It was the result of him being unable to completely block my attacks. If it wasn't for his skeleton body that never grew tired, he would have been knocked out from the exhaustion already.

“Haaaaaap!”

[Critical Hit!]

[Kyak, kyaaaaaaak!]

It was then. Unable to finish chanting Skeleton Rise, the Skeleton Knight, whose breastplate shattered completely, let out a scream like he could no longer endure it. Immediately afterwards, my movements stopped. I wondered if it was a time stopping ability ([The World](#)), but that wasn't it. It was just that my movements were slowed to the extreme.

Fans of Jojo's Bizzare Adventures knows this one. Za Warudo!

[Skeleton Knight uses 'Undead Roar'! Those with living bodies are slowed to 5 percent of their maximum speed!]

“O...r...!”

Argh, even my talking speed got slower! Being relieved that I just now learned how to activate skills without saying their names, I activated Divine Speed. When I noticed it had succeeded, my next action was clear.

“Uwaaaaaaaak!”

[You used Orc Lord's Warcry! All party members are cleansed

of negative status effects. All party members' attack power increases by 50 percent for the duration. All party members become super-armored, unfazed by enemy attacks.]

The sense of weakness that enveloped me disappeared. It was a suffocating moment I didn't even want to think about. I released the tension I felt in my shoulders and aimed my spear at the Skeleton Knight.

"You're dead."

[H-How!? My Undead Roar!]

"Die!"

From then on, I simply beat him up, again and again until his skull shattered. This time, I was completely silent so as to prevent him from doing anything strange. The few skeletons that had remained alive also backed away in order to not get in my way.

"I just want to quietly commit suicide."

"Don't even breathe. He'll notice!"

"I don't want to be beaten to death by him... let's just kill each other."

“That’s it!”

[A Grand Achievement! You defeated the Floor Master, Skeleton Knight, alone! Amazing!]

[You became level 31. You obtained the qualification to advance to the 31st floor.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[You obtained the title, ‘Skeleton Knight Slayer.’ All stats permanently increase by 1. This effect will apply even if the title is not equipped.]

[You became Silver Rank 6. Congratulations.]

[You defeated the Skeleton Knight alone. You obtained the special reward, ‘Skeleton Knight’s Plate Armor Top.’]

[You obtained 50,000 gold.]

[Choose your reward.]

[1. Riding Magic Book.]

I looked around and placed the silent wilderness' scenery in my eyes. All the skeletons had disappeared and everything was still in the moonlit wilderness. 'Huu' Letting out a sigh, I checked the solo raid reward. Riding Magic Book?

[You learned Riding. You can ride and battle on horses, elephants, Pegasi, cars, tanks, etc., and all disadvantages from riding them disappears.]

It was an amazing magic. It covered animal riding and even tank piloting! It made sense that it was considered magic rather than a technique. All knowledge and techniques pertaining to 'riding' were engraved into my mind. As long as it was rideable, I knew the way of doing so. Unfortunately, there wasn't a method of riding a Gundam. Realizing that there were no Gundams in the world, I became slightly disappointed.

"The solo raid rewards are really all special... Let's go back now."

[Master, spear!]

"Oh yeah."

With Peika's reminder, I picked up the Silver Spear I threw out. Then, I opened the door standing unnaturally in one corner of the wilderness. The Floor Shop was only a few steps away. Lin who was there batted his eyes after seeing me come out. When I closed the door, his mouth opened wide. The cigarette that was in his

mouth fell to the ground.

“Y-You...!”

“You forgot my name?”

“You, pa, passed? In one try?”

“Yep.”

“O-One. One...”

Lin almost seemed out of breath as he opened and closed his mouth repeatedly. His thick lizard tail was spinning around as well.

“How many? How many people passed? No, it must have been ten! How did you gather a full party in just one day? It usually takes four days for ten people to gather...!”

“Eh? What are you talking about?”

I really did wonder what he was talking about.

“You said to clear the dungeon alone. Don’t you remember?”

“When I said clear the dungeon, I, of course, meant the ordinary



floors. How would you clear the boss raid alo... alone?”

“Yep.”

Lin shut his mouth tightly. I tilted my head, distributed my level up bonus stats, and stretched my body to challenge the boss again. Then, Lin suddenly asked.

“Until the 25th floor! Did you do solo raids?”

“Yep.”

“Haa... That means the number of skills in your pocket watch is?”

“Five.”

“...”

Lin took out a new cigarette and put it in his mouth.

“That woman, she put me with you on purpose...!”

“Loretta did? Why?”

“She probably expected me to pick a fight with you. Then I’d undoubtedly make a bet and...”

I thought he was overthinking it and simply laughed it off. Lin, on the other hand, had a rotten expression. He wasn't even smoking the cigarette in his mouth, only gnawing on it. Finally, he let out a deep sigh.

"It's been a while since I suffered such a blow. I'm the one at fault for being tricked but... you're not bad yourself, Earth's Hero."

"I said don't call me that."

"I don't even know anymore. Just go as far as you want. This Lin-nim will watch over you."

"Wow, that was almost exactly the same thing Loretta said."

"... Ah... is that so...?"

I thought that was it, but Lin's expression became even worse. Although I really wanted to take a before-and-after photo of Lin's pretty face, I unfortunately didn't have a camera. After all, there was no reason to carry around a camera in my inventory.

Come to think of it, this boar that was filling up 240 spaces in my inventory, I had to take care of it somehow. If I brought it out on Earth, people would notice it instantly, and it wouldn't fit on the dungeon floor...

‘Ei, I’ll have to keep it for now.’

## Chapter 68. Fairy Garden (1)

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The 30th Floor Master, Skeleton Knight's Undead Roar was an extremely annoying skill. Although Orc Lord's Warcry countered it perfectly, the fact that I could only use it once a day held me down.

Was there an alternative? Of course, there was. I could use Dark Thunder Explosion. The Skeleton Knight wouldn't be able to dodge Dark Thunder Explosion at such a close range, and I could last throughout the Undead Roar's 10 second duration using Dark Thunder Explosion's duration.

Although Dark Thunder Explosion wouldn't be as potent because the Skeleton Knight was made out of bones, he would at least be paralyzed for the duration.

As Dark Thunder Explosion could also only be used once per day, I could rely on Dragon Skin for the third raid. If I succeeded in using Dragon Skin, I could last for the 10 seconds no matter what kind of attacks the Skeleton Knight used. At the very least, I wouldn't die.

If possible, I wanted to do it without using the limited Floor Master skills. However, unless I brought in a priest who could use Status Effect Defense magic, I couldn't think of a way to resist the Skeleton Knight's skill.

I tried asking Lin, but he said equipment that could block Undead Roar were only sold past the 60th floor. Although I shouldn't be the one to say this, but all Floor Master skills really were cheats!

[I'll show you what a true knight looks like!]

However, the Skeleton Knight that appeared on the second raid said rather interesting things.

“Could Floor Masters personalities change too?”

As Floor Masters until now had simple and brutish personalities, so there wasn't a need to consider their personalities. But here on the 30th Floor Master, the change in the Floor Master's personality and his skeleton minions' personalities were clear.

[Everyone, charge! Make the one who dares to invade the dungeon pay with his life!]

“Kuhahaha! I'll change my skull today!”

“His shinbone is mine!”

“His armor looks sturdy. I'll get myself a new armor!”

The skeleton minions made their desire to ransack me clear, as if they were pirates. As the armored skeletons attacked, the skeleton mages and archers also shot their magic attacks and arrows. They couldn't be more ready for battle if they tried.

“It looks like it'll be harder than last time. Peika!”

[Thunder Arrow!]

Peika's elemental magic activated and the mages quickly cast defensive magic, while the melee skeletons rushed towards me with the Skeleton Knight taking charge. Surprisingly, half of the Thunder Arrows dissipated without being able to break through their defense. Of course, the remaining half wiped out the skeleton mages beautifully.

[Master, should I go again?]

“No, it's fine. The archers aren't as dangerous as the mages.”

Although I could consume Mana Potions, they had a cooldown time, meaning drinking other potions would have no effect during that time. My mana wasn't bountiful to the point I could freely use elemental magic yet. Slowly circulating Peruta Circuit, I thrust my spear forward.

I was facing an army of skeletons over 200 large. Although it was a different sight compared to the disorderly first Floor Master battle, I preferred the difficulty to be set on high than easy.

“Everyone come fight me!”

[You used Provoke! All enemies will attack you with great hostility!]

---

“Waaaaaak!”

“Let’s trample him! Take his rib bones!”

“Take his skull!”

The skeletons’ footsteps became faster. With a grin, I shot out my spear. The current of mana spiraling through the spear stormed to the skeletons, wanting to rip them to shreds.

“Tempest!”

[Critical Hit!]

“Uguk!”

“Kuaaaak!”

The skeletons and the arrows shot by skeleton archers all bounced off of Tempest’s strength. Death Counter made the attack 50 percent stronger and Skull Breaker’s effect increased the critical hit rate and damage. All the skeletons that were struck by critical hits had no other choice but to die.

[Skull Breaker, you wield elementals!]

The Skeleton Knight became enraged and charged towards me on his skeleton mount. His terrifying appearance and large sword gave off an imposing aura. Very satisfied at his appearance, I shouted as I ran to meet him.

“Sorry, but that wasn’t an elemental magic!”  
[Kuooooooooo!]

His sword came from an odd direction and aimed for my neck. Since it was easy to dodge it knowing where it was aiming for, I slid toward skeleton mount’s legs with my spear in hand. As the skeleton mount lost its balance and staggered, the Skeleton Knight’s sword naturally lost its trajectory and failed to even glaze me.

[Skull Breaker!]

“Yeah, I’ll crush your head! First, get off of your cool horse!”

Damn, his skeleton mount really was too cool. My shout full of jealousy was returned with a counterattack. Just like before, I slid down the skeleton mount’s legs and disrupted his balance. The furious Skeleton Knight then shouted.

[Kill Skull Breaker!]

“Everyone charge!”



“His seventh cervical vertebrae is mine!”

Stop with that cervical vertebrae talk!

[You obtained 50,000 gold.]

[Rewards will be distributed in order of contribution.]

[Kang Shin-nim’s contribution is the highest. Choose your reward.]

[1. Bone Strengthening Elixir

2. Skeleton Knight’s Helmet]

It was here, the Bone Strengthening Elixir! I felt my excitement from battle continuing to the reward picking stage. As expected, the 30th Floor Master dropped the Bone Strengthening Elixir. After all, skeletons appeared from the 26th floor! I chose the Bone Strengthening Elixir and swallowed it without hesitation.

[Your bones are transformed to become tougher and stronger. Strength and constitution both increase by 1.]

“Ooooooooooh!”

I already expected constitution to increase, but strength increased as well! I did an uppercut into the air and reveled in my happiness. I soon snapped out of it. I had no more business in this wilderness. Just when I was about to leave, I received a message. It was a from Hwaya.

[Y-Yeon Hwawoo.]

“Yeah, Mas... Hwaya. What’s up?”

[TV... Are you watching TV?]

“I’m in the dungeon, why?”

Then, I received a KaTalk. When I opened it up, father had uncharacteristically sent me a picture. There was no wifi in the dungeon. How mean.

When I looked at the picture with that in mind...

‘... Since when did Osaka Castle have swirling dark red cloud effects?’

[Most of the Event Dungeons left uncleared turned into Field Dungeons!]

The question that popped into my head was quickly answered by Hwaya.

Now that I thought about it, a bunch of messages did ring out in the middle of battle. I quickly asked the message noona to bring up the message log.

[S-rank Event Dungeon, 'Wyvern's Nest,' turned into a Field Dungeon! When the boss monster isn't periodically subjugated, monsters might break out of the dungeon.]

[B+-rank Event Dungeon, 'General's Honor,' turned into a Field Dungeon! When the boss monster isn't periodically subjugated, monsters might break out of the dungeon.]

[A+-rank Event Dungeon, 'Graveyard Over the Lake,' turned into a Field Dungeon! When the boss monster isn't periodically subjugated, monsters might break out of the dungeon.]

[B-rank Event Dungeon, 'Ghoul's Resting Place,' turned into a Field Dungeon! When the boss monster isn't periodically subjugated, monsters might break out of the dungeon.]

[D-rank Event Dungeon, 'Goblin's Den,' turned into a Field Dungeon! When the boss monster isn't periodically subjugated, monsters might break out of the dungeon.]

[C+-rank Event Dungeon...]

“Hwaya, do you know what a Field Dungeon is?”

[I’m not sure, but the dungeons that were only accessible through the Gates seemed to have moved to Earth. Not to mention... It looks like these dungeons won’t go away even if you clear them.]

“I’m sure some people will be happy about that.”

Of course, the world was already overflowing with monsters. There were places where entire countries were felled by monsters and turned into their nests, and places that were specifically given to monsters. Even small village-side mountains were now off limits. For anyone looking to hunt monsters, there were more than enough of them.

However, monster group colonies were extremely dangerous. No one knew where they would pop out from. Not even satellites could determine their location. Monsters constantly moved, transformed, and became fully grown at the most unexpected times. It really made one angry. It was also the reason Guardians and Freedom Wings traveled in large units. This fact also caused the high death rate of rogues.

On the other hand, dungeons had many of the same type of monsters. Once the initial exploration was finished, it was possible to estimate the monsters’ level of danger. Plus, as they were limited areas, it was possible to optimize the explorers that went in. Overall, it was much easier to hunt in the dungeons than in the wild.

[Yep, for dungeons with moderate difficulty, hunters would gather, so there would be no problem subjugating them. However, for dungeons that had A-rank or above difficulty...]

“Guardians, who are obligated to go protect the citizens, would die.”

[Guardian will surely ask Freedom Wing for help. They wouldn't be able to ignore the public outcry.]

“Hwaya, will you be fine? You're Britain's Guardian.”

[I'm not. You know about it, right? The A+-rank Event Dungeon turned into a A+-rank Field Dungeon. All Guardians S-rank and above were summoned to assess its danger.]

“You have it rough. Well, if it's you, you'll be fine.”

[Thanks for the compliment, but... huu...]

Hwaya's voice was filled with annoyance. I first got out of the wilderness and left the dungeon as well. I had to see what was happening on Earth with my own eyes.

“You're here, son.”

“You're not changing the channel, right? Let me see.”

“Go ahead. Hm, it’s a good thing we took care of Yeungdeungpo’s dungeon so quickly.”

“Really.”

Father was sitting on the couch in a casual clothing, while eating popcorn and watching TV. It seemed he didn’t care much about other countries’ problems. Although he was my father, I was jealous of his simple way of thinking. Looking at father from the corner of my eyes, I continued my conversation with Hwaya.

[You know Britain has another SS-rank other than me, right?]

“Yeah. I heard it’s a man.”

[Joshua Brightman. He’s called the world’s toughest man.]

“Joshua Brightman, huh. Eh? I’ve heard his name before.”

[He’s a chaebol. The owner of a famous clothing enterprise.]

A chaebol awakening as an SS-rank? Why did I feel like that was as cheaty as a dungeon explorer awakening as an ability user? However, since I was also a cheaty person by that reasoning, I couldn’t really complain.

[He’s 37 this year.]

“He’s in his late thirties.”

[He proposed to me.]

“That’s something to congratulate. Wouldn’t he be the world’s number one suiter?”

[He already has a wife. He probably has multiple girlfriends as well.]

Oh, so he’s a bastard.

[I’d rather die, that pervert! You too! Don’t congratulate me! Worry!]

“Ah, well, yeah. I’m worried. You refused, right?”

[Of course. I utterly spit on his proposal, but he just won’t give up. I ran away to Korea because I didn’t want to face him, but I’ll have to see him when I go back... haa.]

Even with the distance we were separated by, I could clearly picture her frowning face from her sigh filled with despair. Although I almost laughed, I held it in.

“Don’t worry about it. It’s normal for men to hit on girls as beautiful as you. Since you’re strong, you can strike him down.”

[... Say that again.]

“Hm? Since you’re strong, you can strike him down...?”

[Before that.]

“It’s normal for men to hit on girls.”

[In between.]

“.. on girls as beautiful as you?”

[Mmm... Okay, I’ll try my best.]

“I don’t know which part of that cheered you up.”

[As soon as I take care of this Field Dungeon problem, I’ll invite you to Britain. You’ve never visited, right? Come visit with Sumire and Yungoong ajusshi!]

“Oh, sure...?”

[Good! I’ll contact you later!]

I’ll gladly go if there’s an invite. I wanted to see Big Ben,



Westminster Abbey, and Buckingham Palace. Even while training with father, we strangely never visited Britain. Hwaya's sudden change in tone did bother me slightly, but it was too late to ask her now.

“There's no need for us to move this time. It's not something we have to urgently take care of, and other countries have Awakened too.”

“Of course. But the increased chance of an Event Raid breaking out at places that turned into Field Dungeons bothers me.”

“Well, we'll find out when the time comes.”

When I retorted to comments father made naturally and glanced at him, he lay down on the couch like he didn't really care. I went over the conversation with Hwaya with my head tilted. Then, father turned his head toward me and casually proclaimed.

“By the way, I'm currently in the middle of breaking through the 37th floor.”

“Yeah, yeah. I bet you were itching to brag.”

Unlike father, I'm taking my time collecting all the things I need! You're so scared of losing, you don't even ask me to spar!

## Chapter 69. Fairy Garden (2)

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After Event Dungeons turned into Field Dungeons, small countries without enough Awakened to properly maintain them were practically robbed of their money by the Guardian Association, who deployed their Awakened under the pretense of maintenance fees. They could more safely hunt monsters in the Field Dungeons than in the wild, and they even received additional money from the small countries. It was truly a clever money making tactic. Many countries' Freedom Wing branches also participated in Field Dungeon subjugations using the same pretense.

The problem were the dungeons with comparatively higher ranks. Japan's B+-rank Field Dungeon, 'General's Honor,' and Britain's Lake District's Windermere Lake A+-rank Field Dungeon, 'Graveyard Over the Lake,' were especially of concern due to their large area, the high number of named monsters, and the high intelligence of their monsters.

Finally, Arizona State's Antelope Canyon, which once boasted beautiful scenery, was now the object of people's fears after turning into the S-rank Field Dungeon, Wyvern's Nest. These three dungeons were the ones people were having trouble subjugating.

[I'm so annoyed. He bothers me at least once every hour!]

“Just set him on fire.”

[Oh, I tried. When I told him to screw off before I burnt all his hair up, he laughed and said, ‘What a cute kitten. I’ll come back when you’re feeling better.’]

“You sure have it rough, having to clear dungeons with someone like him...”

Graveyard Over the Lake, which the two SS-rank ability users, Hwaya and Joshua Brightman, and four other S-rank ability users were exploring, was the world’s largest dungeon, stretching over 16 square kilometers. As its monsters were A+-rank, it seemed that it would take a long time to completely explore the area. According to Hwaya, she and the other ability users explored the dungeon on a modified cruise ship.

“That sounds fun. I always wanted to go on a Windermere cruise ship.”

[After Windermere turned into a dungeon, it’s no longer a good tourist location... you don’t know how many people are sad about it. Plus, since it’s so high-ranked, ordinary ability users can’t do anything about it. Not to mention, Field Dungeons don’t disappear after being cleared. I’m worried it’ll come back to bite me even after I clean it up once.]

“Aren’t there people blaming you? After all, you had a huge influence on countries’ decisions to leave the Event Dungeons alone.”

[Because of what happened in China, no one is really blaming

me.]

“Ah... well, that’s good to hear.”

Although Hwaya might be thankful that China took care of her worry, I didn’t want to admit that whoever was in charge of China’s disaster had a positive impact on someone’s life.

“Aren’t you messaging me too often these days?”

[It’s because I’m stressed... If you had to talk to that self-proclaimed gentleman, you’d want to relieve your stress too.]

“Look at the beautiful Windermere Lake and cheer up.”

[Ah, that tuna came out again!]

“... Good luck.”

Being inwardly happy that [Gyeongbokgung Palace](#) didn’t turn into an Event Dungeon, I ended my conversation with her. In front of my eyes was Lin, who was smoking on his cigarette as always.

Considered the most beautiful and grandest palace in Korea.

“Are doing boss raids and talking with your friend the only things you do? Can’t you think about my scorching heart after being tricked into betting with you?”

“Lin, does the Residential Area Entrance Ticket disappear once you use it?”

“If a Draconian is talking to you, listen to him!”

Lin flicked his cigarette ash towards me as he fretted. I swung my spear and returned the ashes back to him.

“I’m asking Lin so I could find better things to do.”

“Don’t just skip out on parts of the conversation! ... Alright, what? Residential Area? You got a ticket?”

“Yes.”

Puffing out cigarette smoke, Lin thought for a brief moment, then gave an exclamation of surprise.

“Obviously, the entrance ticket will disappear once you use it. But if you somehow manage to buy a residence at the Residential Area, you’ll be able to travel back and forth whenever you want. You just have to install a Mana Stone and get authorized.”

“Wait, can you repeat that part about the Mana Stone?”

“Don’t you know what a Mana Stone is? You know, the thing that comes out from monsters’ heads? It’s the reason for the

monsters' strong and strange biology. The reason they're distinguished from humans. The difference is being able to control mana or being controlled by mana.”

Hearing this, I remembered something. A story from long time ago, when I first heard about dungeon explorers from father!

[In the dungeon, there are lots of precious things. Mana Stones, magical weapons... heck, even orc skin would be treated as new material never-before-seen on Earth...]

That's right, Mana Stones! I remembered now! But now that I thought about it, I had never even seen a Mana Stone even though I was on the 30th floor. As for magical weapons, the automatic Silver Crossbow in my inventory could count as one. I had only gotten one when I was on the 30th floor! Not to mention, the orc skins were just trash items rather than a new material! If I sold it anywhere, I would have had to talk to the police!

I couldn't help but tremble as I was reminiscing about the past. I became a dungeon explorer after being tricked by father's words! Of course, I didn't regret it in the slightest now, but I did resent father for tricking me when he had never owned Mana Stones or magical weapons. I vowed to get my revenge.

“I've never seen a Mana Stone.”

“Huh? Well, that's a given. Monsters that appear below the 20th floor of the First Dungeon are weaklings who don't have Mana Stones, and since the 21st through 40th floors all have undead

monsters, they don't have Mana Stones. You'll have to get to the 41st floor to see some."

"Kuk..."

"Don't worry. If you go to the Residential Area's market, you'll meet other explorers selling some. Just buy one randomly and buy a house randomly too. Once you can install the mana stone at the house and go through the authorization process, you can freely go back and forth between your house and the dungeon. Just like how you can go back and forth between the dungeon and Earth."

"That... That sounds like I can live in the dungeon without ever having to go back to Earth."

When I said what I was thinking aloud, Lin sneered for a moment. When I noticed it, he changed his expression to a big smile. For a man, he had a very womanly charm, which made me take a step back. It was undoubtedly charming, but it was the kind of charm that made a chill run down one's spine.

"Of course. That's possible, Earth's Hero."

"..."

"You'll find out when you get there, but I'll tell you in advance. The word 'escapee' is forbidden. If you don't want to become a common enemy at the Residential Area, don't say that word."

“Escapee...?”

“I said it’s forbidden. Understood?”

“Y-Yes.”

“Huu...”

He took out another cigarette and put it in his mouth while lighting it up. When I looked at him cautiously, he grinned and advised me.

“By the way, since any residence at the Residential Area will be too expensive for a soloing explorer to buy, you won’t be able to do anything even if you go. You’ll only end up wasting the entrance ticket you worked so hard to get.”

Since he kindly advised me, I decided to tell him the truth.

“Because of an achievement I made, I got a Special Mansion Free Purchase Ticket.”

“You... make me angry...!”

As I thought, an angry expression suited Lin the best! Since I knew I could freely go back and forth between the dungeon and the Residential Area once I installed a Mana Stone, I just had to go there and buy one! Excited, I used my Residential Area Entrance



Ticket on the spot.

“Ah, wait! If it’s a Special Mansion, you need a Mana Stone matching its league...!”

Because I already used the entrance ticket, I couldn’t hear Lin very well. Just like when I entered Event Dungeons, my surroundings began to melt. Like removing the rust, the dungeon was slowly getting erased.

Then, a new world appeared in front of my eyes.

[You entered the Residential Area.]

“Argh, I died again. On the 55th floor.”

“Kukuku, the 55th is hard to cross, I know. Let’s just go for a drink.”

“Damn it, the king’s going to say something again.”

While I was dazed by the sudden change in scenery, two middle-aged men brushed past me. I first slapped away his hand trying to grab the spear behind my back.

“I won’t say much, so just go drink.”

“Kuk, I thought you were a newbie, but you’re quite skilled. Alright, we’ll leave. Consider it a welcome ceremony.”

Aiming for a martial artist’s weapon, he was lucky I didn’t cut off his wrist.

Since I knew directly fights between explorers were forbidden, I could tell him off after hearing him speak about the 55th floor. Though, to be explorers on the 55th floor, they looked too weak.

They were most likely lying. Because I was standing in a daze on my first time entering the Residential Area, they were trying to stomp on my spirit by talking about the 55th floor and steal my weapon. Although it was true that I was in a daze, my training wasn’t so loose that I wouldn’t notice someone stealing my weapon from right under my nose.

After seeing the two explorers off, I looked around. I instantly knew how to describe the scenery. It was like the vibrant streets of Medieval Europe. The buildings built with colorful bricks were incredibly beautiful, while the pretty stones making up the floor were clean and without gaps.

There was one thing I didn’t quite understand. It was that this place, which should be somewhere in the dungeon, had a sky full of clouds.

Other than this mystery, this place was certainly wonderful. The sight of so many dungeons explorers walking around with theirs

weapons was almost dreamlike. Everything fit well with the area.

“Hey, handsome young man over there! Would you like a slice of ‘doragonu,’ the tastiest fruit in all of Sylon continent? Since Sylon continent is already ruined, you can’t find doragonu anywhere else!”

This place had fruit sellers who sold fruit I had never heard of before...

“That spear doesn’t look so good. Do you want to look around World Piresia’s high-ranking weapons?”

It had weapon shops that sold weapons from worlds I had never heard of before.

“It’s only noon and you’re drinking, you losers! If you got kicked out of the dungeon, quietly go back to your world!”

“That world is ruined already!”

There was even a foul-mouthed beauty serving alcohol and curses at her customers.

“Mm, it’s not that big. It’s probably about the size of a small town.”

The city didn’t have any residences belonging to explorers. To be

exact, this place wasn't the Residential Area, but an intermediate area to get to the Residential Area. It was a public space created for the Residential Area's explorers to interact. Since just the intermediate area was this size, it was perhaps a little rude of me to call it small. However, since I was used to living in Korea's capital, this place could only be small in comparison.

That said, I didn't dislike this place filled with lively explorers. It was fun looking at each of the shops the explorers were running, and the fountain plaza I was summoned to was also incredibly beautiful.

Alright then, the place where I could buy the Special Mansion is... No, wait. Someone had told me to contact her when I came to the Residential Area.

"Palludia, are you in the dungeon?"

[... Kang Shin?]

"Yeah, you told me to contact you when I came to the Residential Area, remember?"

[... Wa... Wait. J-Just one moment!]

Then, in the three hours that I was looking around the Residential Area, I didn't receive any messages from Palludia. A girl's words really weren't something you could trust.

## Chapter 70. Fairy Garden (3)

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During that time, I leisurely walked around the Residential Area's marketplace, checking the market value of the items here and which stores were where. I met two more people who tried to steal my weapon.

One was an old man who acted feeble and begged for money, then tried to take my spear and run. I grabbed him by his arm and held him with a leg lock. The next one was an explorer exposing much of her voluptuous figure, who approached me with a friendly smile. While I was shyly responding to her, she tried to sneakily take my spear and run with a stealth skill.

Of course, she couldn't trick my senses. I twisted her wrist and got my spear back. I grabbed her by the edge of her dress and threw her over my shoulder (not being able to feel her skin because of my armor would forever remain a regret). She then threw out all sorts of curses as she ran away.

Realizing that my Black Earthen Spear looked like a great weapon to other people, I stopped foolishly carrying it around. I usually stored it in my inventory, but I didn't have the time to put it away, since I came to the Residential Area right after speaking to Lin.

Then, I finally found the place where I could purchase a residence. The place I arrived at, after asking several people, was called the 'First Dungeon Official Trading Center.' Also known as the 'market,' it was a place where explorers auctioned off items found in the dungeon, bought houses or even Event Dungeon Entrance Tickets.

The manager of the trading center was not human. When I noticed him, he noticed me as well and quickly spoke.

“I’m going to say this beforehand, don’t take out your weapon. We’ll both get tired.”

“... A hobgoblin, right?”

Instead of taking out my weapon, I guessed his identity. The green-skinned hobgoblin, who was sitting on a chair looking over documents, clapped after hearing my guess. His black uniform was one thing, but his white silk gloves did not suit him in the slightest.

“How did you notice right away? Amazing!”

“Normal goblins aren’t as tall as you, nor are they as intelligent.”

At my words, a smile bloomed on the hobgoblin’s wrinkly face. In truth, he looked quite silly. Elves, hobgoblins, and fairies were all the same race, but how could there be such an unfortunate difference...?

“Mm, good, good. It’s been a while since I’ve seen a newcomer with some common sense. What business do you have? Are you trying to auction an item? Alright, although there’s usually a 10% fee, we’ll make it 5% since this is your first time. You just have to fill out this form with the auction duration, lowest amount, and

item description...”

“Ah, no. I’m trying to claim a house.”

“House?”

The hobgoblin then scanned me from head to toe and made a surprised expression.

“20th floor’s Lizard Knight Set, right?”

“Right.”

“Amazing. I didn’t think there would be an explorer that completed set equipment nowadays. I’m happy to have met a young man with a bright future. My name is Meladel. You can call me [hyung](#).”

Older brother

The sense of distance shorted greatly.

“I’m Kang Shin. Take good care of me, Meladel.”

“Tsk, is it that hard to call me hyung? Well, whatever. Kang Shin, I fully understand your ability. Being able to defeat a Floor Master by yourself, you should be proud. However...”

He continued as he stamped on documents he pulled out of nowhere with his stamp that he also pulled out of nowhere.

“In the Residential Area, residences have a great significance. This place is full of people wanting to escape their worlds that are heading to ruin and secure safe spaces for themselves. There are also people who wish to form interdimensional organizations through guilds. Not to mention, it is required for Dimension Mercenaries to own residences in the Residential Area.”

When I heard Meladel’s words, I finally understood what Lin meant. That is, if I was understanding Meladel correctly.

“Escaping their worlds that are heading to ruin... You mean, if you have a residence in the dungeon, you don’t have to go back to your own world?”

“Right. After you install a Mana Stone and get authorized, even if your vitality becomes zero while exploring the dungeon, you’ll return to your home in the Residential Area rather than the world you came from. Of course, you still won’t be able to continue exploring the dungeon for a week, but you’ll still be able to escape the world you came from.”

“... I see.”

So that’s why they were called ‘escapees.’ It was truly fitting. Dungeon explorers’ worlds were all in huge or fatal trouble. The Luka continent had the demon race and the Edias continent had the invaders. Although Ren didn’t say what happened to the Panan



continent, it seemed more hopeless than any of the other worlds.

If that was the case, it was perfectly normal for people to want to escape from their worlds. They could either die while fighting against a danger they couldn't fight off alone, or they could survive by running away to the dungeon. The choice was clear.

I also understood why the word 'escapee' was forbidden. The ones who abandoned their worlds would undoubtedly have a sense of guilt in their hearts. Whether they were chosen by the dungeon or chosen by an explorer, they would have received a certain amount of expectations the moment they became dungeon explorers. As the one who will be their world's savior, as the one who will fight against the danger.

However, they ran away. In face of the danger their worlds faced, they cowered in fear and ran. Or, they were burdened by the expectations the people of their worlds placed on them.

... I couldn't blame them. I didn't want to call them 'escapees.' As someone who had yet to face any serious danger and did not even have the courage to reveal himself to his world as an Awakened, I didn't have the right.

As such, I stopped this line of thinking, and began to ask Meladel about words I had not heard about before.

“What are Dimension Mercenaries?”

“They’re mercenaries that go out to aid other worlds. When a world’s explorer requests them, they can travel to that world’s dimension. They’re explorers whose main jobs are completing these requests and getting compensated. They’re incredibly strong. None of them are weak. The requirement to become a Dimension Mercenary is also complicated. You need to have a high enough level, the ‘Return’ skill, which you can only get through a few special ways, the ‘Dimensional Travel’ skill, which lets you travel to other worlds, and be in a certain league of existence. And since they can’t be tied to one world, they have to own their own houses in the Residential Area.”

Wow, that sounded so cool. So they were specialists even amongst dungeon explorers. It also seemed you could get the Return skills in places other than the 15th floor.

That was the extent of my impression.

“Unfortunately, there is a finite number of houses in the Residential Area. 5 Special Mansions, 20 First-grade Mansions, 200 Second-grade Mansions, 500 First-grade Houses, 2,000 Second-grade Houses, 5,000 Third-grade houses, and finally 500 Tenement Houses that each fit about ten families. You got that?”

“That’s 12,725 families in total. Unless explorers marry each other, less than a third of First Dungeon’s dungeon explorers can occupy them.”

Hobgoblin Meladel solemnly nodded his head and continued.

“That’s right! And to buy a room in a Tenement House, you need... 10 million gold! You need 10 million gold to buy a room in a Tenement House.”

“Then are there rooms available?”

Although 10 million was certainly an enormous amount, I asked Meladel, thinking it actually might not take too long to collect that much. Meladel then smirked and explained further.

“No. With how long the dungeon’s been around, do you think there would be any empty rooms? What I meant was, there might be explorers who would give up their rooms for 10 million gold.”

“They’d throw away their homes for 10 million gold?”

“They can enter guilds instead.”

It seemed I would need to bother Meladel for a little longer.

“Can I ask a few more things? I know you must be busy, but I’m curious about what guilds are.”

“Time is gold, and just like you said, I’m a busy hobgoblin. But you’re an explorer with a bright future, and my golden intuition as a hobgoblin is telling me that building a closer relationship with you will be incredibly beneficial for me. Plus, I’m an excellent hobgoblin that can do my work while talking with others.”

If there's one thing I understood, it was that he was a goblin with eloquent speech and high self-esteem.

"I explained a bit before, but a guild refers to an organization built around one incredibly strong leader and explorers from all dimensions who have similar goals. They live together in something called the Guild House, and its members might form small parties to explore together, or the entire guild might come together to clear an Event Dungeon or an Event Raid. With strong trust between its members, a guild becomes stronger. There's a reason why so many explorers want to become Guild Masters."

"I assume there are requirements to becoming a Guild Master?"

"Of course."

Meladel put down his stamp, and picked up his pen. He then continued as he filled out more documents.

"First, someone who wishes to become a Guild Master must be at least be a Gold rank explorer. In other words, a Guild Master has to at least be level 50."

"I see."

"He must also own a mansion. Normal houses cannot be used as Guild Houses."

“Ah, so he needs to own a Guild House as well. So you would at least need a Second-grade Mansion.”

“That’s exactly right. In other words, at any time, the First Dungeon cannot have more than 225 guilds. However, mansions aren’t something you can just buy with money.”

“Achievements, right?”

He took his eyes off his documents and looked at me.

“... Right. Achievements. He needs to complete an achievement that anyone will acknowledge. If he does, he would obtain the qualification to buy a mansion. That qualification is called the Purchase Ticket. Depending on the quality and type of achievement he completed, the different kinds of mansions he can buy and how cheap he can buy them for would be determined. Although this might sound a bit strange, the worth of an uncompleted achievement increases as time goes on. The highest level of achievements are the ‘first’ achievements. In other words, the way to complete a great achievement right now would be to become the first to complete an achievement that has never been completed before. An achievement that has never been completed in the long history of the dungeon... you understand how valuable that would be, right?”

When I heard his explanation, I finally understood why succeeding in the Lizard Knight solo raid in my first challenge was such an amazing achievement. An achievement never-before-completed in the long history of the dungeon... I had succeeded in exactly that. Succeeding in the Lizard Knight first challenge solo

raid.

“That’s why the mansions are a bit more open compared to the houses. There are still several ownerless Second-grade Mansions and 3 ownerless First-grade Mansions. One of the only five Special Mansions in the entire Residential Area, Marianne’s Garden, is also awaiting its owner, which has never appeared since the founding of the dungeon. There are quite a lot of explorers that are curious about the one that will become the owner of Marianne’s Garden.”

With that, he looked at me.

“But it seems that curiosity won’t last long. Don’t you agree, owner?”

“As I thought, you noticed.”

“Hmph, I noticed it when you said you would ‘claim’ a house rather than ‘purchase.’ Although I didn’t think it would be the Special Mansion.”

He really was smart. With a smile, I took out the Special Mansion Free Purchase Ticket and gave it to him. He put his reading glasses and carefully examined the ticket. Then, he let out a deep sigh.

“Lord... made a big decision. Alright, congratulations. Kang Shin, from today, you are the owner of the Special Mansion, Marianne’s Garden. I, Hobgoblin Meladel, Elder of the Fairy Garden, acknowledge it with my name.”

[You became the owner of the Special Mansion, Marianne's Garden.]

[The key to the mansion is vested upon you. You can find it in your inventory.]

I opened my inventory and examined the key. It was slightly different than the light blue crystal key Loretta gave me, as it seemed to be carved from a jewel radiating a five-colored brilliance. Although it had less cuts than the crystal key, it was bigger and more beautiful. When I reached inside my inventory to grab it, I received a message.

[Your friend, Palludia Gren Ehuir, has invited you to her residence. Would you like to accept?]

“What an impeccable timing.”

“Hm? What's wrong?”

“Ah, my friend invited me to her place. She told me to contact her... I guess she wanted to invite me to her home. Thank you, I'll be going now.”

“... She invited you to her home, huh. Mm, I see.”

Meladel's voice trembled slightly. He stared at me fixedly, then let out a dry cough.

“Kuhum... A girl, right?”

“Yes? Yes.”

“Die.”

“What?”

“Nothing. Hurry up and go. Ptui.”

I didn't know why he suddenly spit on the ground. I turned my back to the hobgoblin, and answered the message as I glanced at the items being sold and the trading center's employees busily running around.

“I accept.”



## Chapter 71. Fairy Garden (4)

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[You will be moved.]

The same phenomenon as when I arrived at the Residential Area happened. When I closed my eyes and opened them, there was a two-story house in front of me. It was an ordinary house with a red brick roof. On it, there was a sign that read Second-grade House. When I looked around, I saw lines of houses that looked exactly the same as this one. When I tried to walk towards one of them, I found myself in the same place I started out. It seemed I couldn't go to the other houses.

“Palludia?”

[C-Come in!]

I opened the front door and walked in. The house, which was built using bricks, was exceedingly ordinary, and its inside was incredibly clean. In truth, it wasn't a place where a girl could live by herself.

Palludia wasn't wearing her usual priestess uniform, but a light blue dress. It perfectly suited her slender arms and legs. For a moment, I was stunned by her beauty. Plus... Hm? Something felt different about her face. What was it? Ah, I could smell perfume!

“Y-You came!”

“Uh, yeah, thanks for having me.”

Though, I didn't really know why she called me.

“Do you want something to drink? R-Right! Tea.”

“...”

On top of her clothes and perfume, she was noticeably acting strange. Her clumsy movements were... cute, but that wasn't important.

“Can I sit?”

“Yeah! On the table!”

She probably meant on the chair by the table. With that, I went and sat down on the chair by the teahouse table. Then, I watched Palludia prepare tea. Even though she was in her own house, she made very awkward movements, like her arms and legs moving in the same direction, or spilling water because her hands were shaking uncontrollably.

From then, it took 20 minutes for Palludia to calm down and finish brewing her tea. It took another 10 minutes for her to sit down at the table and drink tea while facing me. Drinking the lukewarm red tea, I asked Palludia.

“So, what’s the reason you invited me over?”

“... A-Amazing, right? I already have a Second-grade House!”

“Ah, that actually is amazing.”

‘This girl, she changed the subject!’

“Of course, it wasn’t by my strength alone. Many people supported me with their gold. You might not know, but I’m equivalent to the representative of my continent. A mere Second-grade House, it’s nothing against this Palludia Gren Ehuir-nim!”

“Ah, yeah. Congratulations, Palludia.”

For her mental health, I decided not to tell her about my Special Mansion.

“Call me Ludia! T-That’s what everyone calls me.”

“Is it...? Okay, Ludia.”

Shuna did call her Ludia. I thought it was a nickname between close friends. When did Palludia start considering me her friend? Because I didn’t think we’d had a chance to become such close friends, I was quite bewildered.

However, the real bewilderment had yet to happen.

“S-So you see... the... the reason I called you.”

Palludia, no, Ludia’s face was incredibly red. After taking a sip of red tea, she barely managed to continue her words.

“There’s... something I need to explain to you...”

“Okay?”

“M-My family. I-It’s a r-royal family.”

“Yeah.”

I would never forget her words that followed for the rest of my life.

“We... We’re born with eyes that can discern our fated partners. I, I mean, if I marry this person and have children, the royal family would be destined to prosper.”

“... Yeah.”

A chill suddenly ran down my back.

“Apparently it’s because of my bloodline... my ancestor’s blood has a Divine race’s blood mixed in... or so they say.”

“Hm...?”

“W-When we first met.”

For some reason, I didn’t want to hear what she had to say.

“Remember when I was... mean... to you?”

“Y...Yeah.”

I hoped it wasn’t true.

“I knew it the moment I saw you.”

... Really? A girl this pretty, with me? Although I wanted to tell her not to joke around and laugh it off, Ludia’s expression was too serious.

“In truth, I didn’t like it. Why did I have to marry a man I didn’t even know, who even came from another world? That’s why I was so mean to you... I didn’t even think you were an orc! I thought you had an admirable body of a martial artist. I didn’t hate you.”

As she spoke, her voice was getting calmer. She was getting more

and more collected.

“I hated my eyes. I hated my royal bloodline. I hated that I had to marry someone that was chosen without my knowledge. I hated that I was connected to someone that couldn’t even live with me in my world! That’s why I stayed silent. But I didn’t hate you! You saved me twice! You helped me, even when I wasn’t kind to you. In fact, I treated you harshly! When I said I didn’t like you as a person, that was a lie!”

“I, I see. Is that why you added me to your friend list?”

“... Yeah. I didn’t think about marriage, but I didn’t want the connection between us to be severed. Maybe, back then, I was already... N-No. I’ll continue.”

She caught her breath, then asked with a quiet voice.

“... Shina Gren Ehuir. Do you know her?”

I did.

“I know Shina. Ah, Shina Gren Ehuir. I see, she’s your younger sister.”

“Yeah, she’s the second royal princess. Even as a princess, she bravely fights on the frontlines as a knight.”

“But it’s the same for you.”

“M-Me!? I’m a priestess! So it’s not as dangerous.”

“Y-Yeah.”

I can’t, this girl. I had to do something. Although she looked calm, she wasn’t calm at all. She got startled whenever I said something, and the tone of her voice randomly changed as she spoke. It was clear she was incredibly nervous. I understood. I was incredibly nervous too!

“She... She said she’d marry you, so I got scared.”

“Huh?”

This was the first time I heard about it. Today, there were many things I was hearing for the first time.

“She also said her fated partner was you! She kept bragging about how close she was with you, almost as if to taunt me!”

My eyebrows trembled. Scary! Even though we exchanged greetings from time to time, I never even imagined Shina was thinking like that!

“Even if I die, I won’t let Shina have... I mean! I thought I should meet you because of this problem. I didn’t have any ulterior

motives! I just thought it was weird that both sisters picked the same person as their fated partner. I just wanted to confirm, but Mom found out and...”

“Found out?”

“S-She found out you were another world’s Hero...”

Her face reddened as she drooped her head and waved her hand in the air. Although she looked extremely adorable, I understood what she meant in an instant.

“Ludia, t-this house...?”

“... Yeah. Mom and Dad arranged it.”

The Emperor and Empress did!

...As a wedding gift!

“T-Thanks for the tea.”

“Hey!”

When I tried to get up from my seat, Ludia hastily grabbed my arm.



“I, I’m just saying! Don’t jump to conclusions. What, were you worried that I was going to propose to you? You’re not that narcissistic, are you?”

“I understand, so calm down, Palludia.”

“I said call me Ludia!”

“Okay, Ludia. Breathe in. Breathe out.”

“Hu—Ha—“

She obediently followed my words and inhaled in and out. Even as she was being feisty, doing what I told her made her look extremely lova... Huk! I needed to calm down too!

After recomposing herself, she glared at me with teary eyes and spoke.

“I calmed down. S-So! I’m just letting you know. Got it?”

“Yeah, I got it. Well, here’s my thought. Marriage should be done between two people that love each other, right? Being able to tell one’s fated partner, there’s no guarantee it’s 100 percent right. So you don’t have to worry, Ludia.”

“... Stupid. You’re so dense.”

“Hm?”

“It’s nothing!”

I wondered why. She seemed calmer, but she also looked angrier. Unable to figure out why, I panicked. Ah, I was also feeling fluttery. In truth, Ludia was the most beautiful of all the girls I’d met. Although I was doing my best to lower my evaluation of her looks by thinking about her younger self, I couldn’t deny that she was beautiful.

But to think her fated partner was me. My heart had no other choice but to pound! Of course, Ludia didn’t like me at all and was angry about that. Even so, I couldn’t help myself from thinking ‘what if?’

But this wasn’t right.

Something like fate, there was no need to consider it. Anyone that would try to do something with Ludia because of it would be the lowest scum. Ludia trusted me and told me about it honestly. Even if I couldn’t act dignified, I had to at least lessen her burden.

“I’d like you to meet the person you like and be happy with him. You don’t have to worry about something like a fated partner.”

“... How about you? You don’t care at all? Not even a little?”

Ludia, who was listening to me, returned with a question. Her

eyes were teary like she was about to burst into tears. I felt like I couldn't lie in front of such eyes and said with a bitter smile.

“Sorry. I shouldn't mind, but I actually do. A lot. You're incredibly beautiful, and even if you don't act like it, I know you're kind. If a girl like that tells me that I'm her fated partner... of course my heart would race. Sorry, I know I shouldn't, but...”

“... Yes!”

“Hm?”

“Like I said, it's nothing!”

Ludia hastily flapped her hands, but for some reason, her mood seemed to have become much brighter. With a face that was barely holding in a smile, she seemed to be pulling back the corners of her mouth. I didn't know why, but I felt it was a good thing.

“So, mm. Don't listen to Shina no matter what she says, okay? Engrave it in your mind!”

It seemed that was all she planned to say for today. While sipping on the red tea that went cold, I answered.

“Yeah, sure.”

“Even if Shina says you have to marry her because you're her

fated partner, don't listen to her! That girl only likes you because you're strong, so don't think she really likes you. Got it, Kang Shin!?"

"Yeah, I got it."

"And!"

"Hm?"

When I answered her with an exhausted voice, she doodled on the table using the tea water, and continued with a quiet murmuring voice.

"Contact me more often... I'll forget your voice."

"O, Okay."

"You can come by again whenever, too. I'm usually bored."

"Okay."

"You can go now. I'm going to rest."

"Alright, it was fun today."

After saying goodbye to Ludia, I left her house. Although I heard

Ludia letting out a weird sound and falling, I decided to ignore it. After all, she must have had a lot in her mind before telling me.

I was happy that several questions I had regarding Ludia were solved. Thinking that I could continue being good friends with her, the corners of my mouth went up.

‘Alright, now let’s go look at my own house!’

When I touched the key in my inventory, a message rang out in my ear.

[Would you like to move to Marianne’s Garden?]

“Yes.”

When I closed my eyes and opened them, I was in front of a huge mansion.

“It’s too big...”

The garden spread out past the front gate was filled with colorful flowers, and further back were several trees forming a beautiful scenery. I stepped past the iron gate opening slowly in response to my key, and leisurely walked through the stone path while looking around the mansion’s land.

It really was incredibly large. Plus, there were so many fruit trees that I could smell their sweet, subtle fragrance. When I plucked one off and took a bite, an overwhelming sweetness and coolness danced in my mouth. A bit away from the stone path, amongst the trees, I saw what seemed like a spring, but I ignored it for now.

“The mansion... Ah, I see it now.”

The mansion was also enormous. It had a blue roof and was made of ivory-colored bricks. Without exaggeration, it was as big as a few Giant Iron Boars. Its sheer size almost felt exhausting. Right in front of the mansion was a fountain, and a wide, open space around it.

Right! I could leave the Giant Iron Boar here! In the future when I needed to dismantle the Giant Iron Boar, I could do it by the fountain. Not to mention, the water would be close by for me to drink!

After looking around the fountain and the open area, I turned my attention to the inside of the mansion. I climbed the stairs, and another door appeared, which reacted to the key I had and opened.

[You entered Marianne’s Garden.]

[The Mana Stone required for authorization has been confirmed. Would you like to be authorized as the mansion’s owner?]

---

While I was overwhelmed by the sight of the wide hall that appeared past the door, the messages rang out. I couldn't help but be confused. Mana Stone? When did I get a Mana Stone?

But since it said it would authorize me, there was no reason for me to decline. When I accepted the message's offer, my inventory suddenly opened in mid-air.

“W-What?”

When did I open my inventory? While I was confused, something was falling out of my inventory.

It was the Giant Iron Boar's nose.

## Chapter 72. Fairy Garden (5)

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“Huk!?”

Even while I stepped back, almost frightened out of my mind, my inventory was slowly, but surely, sending the Giant Iron Boar out of it.

The inventory freely soared through the air, hovering over a spot in the open area I had just walked by as it spewed out the Giant Iron Boar. Along with a thud, its massive body made the mansion's open ground its home. Although I had expected it to a certain degree, it really ruined the mansion's mystical atmosphere.

After it finished spitting out the entire Giant Iron Boar, my inventory automatically closed itself, as if to say it never acted on its own accord. Hopefully, something so surprising would not happen again. While I was pondering why the boar even popped out, the boar's head began to crack with a thunderous sound.

“Ah, that's it!”

The answer was obvious. Bluestone! The Mana Stone I had was the boar's Bluestone! I watched the scene with a dumbfounded expression. Soon, a Bluestone, no, Mana Stone, bigger than my own body, popped out from its head.

This boar really did have one, a Mana Stone. If China found out about this, they were sure to be painfully jealous. Just how expensive would that thing be if it were sold?



Such a thought was useless, as the Mana Stone flew towards me while becoming smaller. The light it radiated also became stronger. When it arrived in front of my eyes, it had become the size of my thumb, while it shone with a dazzling light. It was almost as if it had compressed itself to increase its purity.

[Place a drop of your blood.]

“Kuk.”

After making a light cut on my finger with my spear, I let a drop of blood fall onto the Mana Stone. Then, the Mana Stone let out an almost blinding light and flew into the mansion. I tried to follow its trajectory, but it had disappeared into the hall's central area in the blink of an eye.

Oong! Immediately afterwards, the entire mansion rumbled.

[You were successfully authorized as the mansion's owner. You can return to the dungeon using your key at any time, and likewise, you can return to the mansion from the dungeon. When your vitality becomes zero, you can return to the mansion, in which case you will still not be able to re-enter the dungeon for a week.]

When my vitality became zero. It meant when I was kicked out of the dungeon after my HP became zero. Although I hadn't died lately, I was glad I could return to the mansion if I did, since I wouldn't want father to find out.

Plus, the fact that I could go back and forth between the dungeon and the Residential Area was the real benefit. I was looking forward to selling things in the Residential Area as well. Not to mention, there were street vendors and bars that were only available here.

Just like that, I became the owner of a mansion I had never even dreamed about. All hail the dungeon! ... In truth, it had not sunken in yet.

[With the Mana Stone installed in the mansion, ventilation, temperature management, cleaning, and other maintenance will be automatically done. However, it is recommended that you appoint another mansion administrator.]

“I mean, since it's so big... just looking around the mansion will be a chore.”

[You will be guided.]

“Mm... No. Before that.”

Holding off on the message noona's unusually generous service, I turned around and stared at the boar, which had its head cracked open. Now that was a chore.

"I have to take care of it."

I gave up after two hours. He was too big! There should be a limit to how big a monster could be. If I wanted to dismantle him completely by myself, even four full days would not be enough.

"Should I put it back in my inventory? Wait, if I just leave it like this, will it rot?"

I murmured as I stood on his head and knocked on it a few times. Then, a semi-transparent window that explained its status automatically appeared in front of my eyes.

#### [Giant Iron Boar's Corpse (Unique)]

The corpse of a B-rank massive raid boss. Its meat is in a class of its own compared to the taste of other monster meats. If handled well and used in medicine, it can permanently increase your stats. Its bones and leather can be used to craft up to A-rank items. It might be better used as a sacrifice for black magic. Even as a corpse, because of the bountiful mana it holds, it will not rot, even if left alone.]

“Mm.”

I learned a few things.

First, eating raid boss meat increased stats. Second, raid boss corpses could be used to craft defensive equipment or weapons that were a rank higher than the boss. Third, I wanted to see the boar become an undead one day.

Most importantly, the fourth, it would not rot even if I left it alone like this!

“Alright, that’s its home for now.”

I nodded my head imperiously and jumped down from its back. Since it wouldn’t rot even if I left it here, there was no need to put it back in my inventory!

When I examined it from below, it really was enormous. However, even if I used it to make defensive equipment or weapons, they would only be A-rank at the highest. Judging by the Black Earthen Spear, which was a reward from an A-rank Event Dungeon, even the best crafted item would only be comparable to the Black Earthen Spear. That said, I would be able to make quite a lot of them. Although it would be perfect to sell them to other Awakened, there was no need to go to that extent to earn money. Not to mention, China might take notice.

“Now, what should I do?”

Since I finished being authorized as the mansion’s owner, I felt relaxed. Should I look around the mansion first? Or should I look for the spring Loretta talked about?

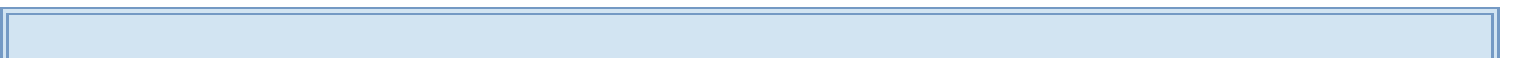
Although I pondered for a long time, the decision was made in an instant. Since it was on my mind, I decided to just visit the spring first. I left the garden and walked into the forested area, while thinking just how absurd it was that a mansion had a forest in its boundaries.

After about 15 minutes, I heard the sound of water. When I hastened my steps towards where the direction of the sound was coming from with joy, the Fairy Spring was there.

“Ooooooh...”

It was truly a picturesque scene. In the spring that wasn’t big or small, a stream of water was shooting out. Inside, small fish were swimming in the almost transparent water.

In addition, numerous flowers surrounded the spring, as if to envelope it in their embrace, and a small tree cast its shadow next to it, creating the perfect resting spot. Although the small area didn’t quite fit in with the enormity of the mansion, it was just my style. Just like the name Loretta called it, I felt like fairies would pop out of the spring at any time.



[You have the key to the Fairy Garden's entrance. Would you like to use the key?]

“... What?”

What did it say? I took out the light blue crystal key from my inventory. What? Fairy Garden? Didn't I hear that name somewhere...? It shouldn't have been too long ago, but I couldn't remember.

After thinking about it for a bit, I gave up. Since there was no chance that Loretta would get angry, I decided to open the entrance.

“Yes.”

[The gate opens.]

Something like the spring splitting in half didn't happen. Instead, the spring's water shot up into the sky and spun in a donut shape. The donut became bigger as more and more water shot up, until it became big enough for a person to fit through. I wouldn't end up underwater after jumping through it, right? Deciding to trust Loretta, I jumped into the gate.

The scenery warped and a strong headache swept over me. For a moment, I couldn't withstand the dizziness and closed my eyes.

When I awoke, I was already in the Fairy Garden.

[Look, it's the Prince!]

[Elemental Tempesssst!]

[I loved that. Spin~]

[I want to form a contract with him.]

[His lightning elemental was so beautiful.]

Voices of elementals were something I always heard, both in the dungeon and on Earth. However, there was an overwhelming number of elementals in this place. My surroundings were full of their colorful lights. If an elf was here to see them... it would be like an amusement park.

Plus, this place didn't just have elementals. There were also fairies, which, unlike elementals, even ordinary people could see. They were spinning around me along with the elementals. In truth, they were quite distracting.

[Queen-nim wanted to see him.]

[I was beaten by the Guild Master for saying it.]

[Beaten!?!]

[Beaten!]

[Queen-nim got beaten!]

[Thieving cat—!]

“Peika.”

[You called, Master?]

I called Peika who I had unsummoned after entering the Residential Area. When Peika appeared, even more elementals and fairies gathered.

[Pretty elemental!]

[Come play with us!]

[W-Wait, go away!]

Looking at Peika acting flustered, I lightly smiled and spoke.

“Go play with the elementals for a little bit. Though, if you don’t



want to, it can't be helped."

[I-If it's Master's request. Okay, what do you guys want to play?]

[Let's play tag!]

[Tag!]

[I like spin spin~]

You probably can't spin spin without me, probably. With that, I left the elementals and fairies to Peika, then walked forward to the inside of the garden, which seemed to be an enlarged version of my mansion's garden. Fairies and balls of light were floating about the area.

There I found a pavilion where a few members of the Faerie race were gathered. There was water flowing around the pavilion, and they sat in the pavilion in a circle, drinking tea. As there was a stack of papers next to them, they didn't look like they were just playing around.

Amongst them was a hobgoblin, an elf, and a beastman with cat ears and tail. Wait, a beastman shouldn't be part of the Faerie race, right?

There was also a short human-like man. He was most likely a dwarf, which was a member of the Faerie race.

“Mm? Who are you, nyan?”

Amongst them, the cat-eared beastman girl was the first to notice me. She didn't try to hide the furry triangular ears that protruded out of her brown bobbed hair. Her eyes shone with a yellow light similar to gold, while cat-like vertical pupils glared at me. Because of her excellent figure that contrasted with her babyface, I was instantly reminded of Yua.

“Why are you even asking, you nyan cat. Master said a human will come by soon, remember?”

The hobgoblin that was drinking tea next to her noticed me in response to the beastman girl's words, and spoke as he smacked her head with the teacup plate. The beastman girl growled and threatened the hobgoblin, but went quiet after more teacup plates struck her head.

The dwarf then turned to face me. I, who was expecting a bearded face like the dwarves described in novels, was surprised after seeing the dwarf was a handsome young man.

“Humans, really. You thought I'd have scraggly beard and muscular body, right?”

“Kuk, you're right. Sorry. I'm Kang Shin. You are?”

“Lotang De Flaima. As you know, I'm a dwarf. Nice to meet you,

human.”

“I’m the hobgoblin Eladel. I heard from Meladel that the owner of the Marianne’s Garden appeared. That must be you.”

“Yes, it’s me.”

Hobgoblins were said to be able to communicate with others of their race through their minds. Eladel must have heard about me from Meladel.

After hearing the word ‘Marianne’s Garden,’ the beastman girl that was sniffing with her head down raised her head.

“Marianne’s Garden, nyan? How did a human who looks so weak become a Special Mansion owner, nyan?”

“Strength doesn’t matter, you nyan cat. What matters is how Lord judged his achievement. Hello, boy. I’m Shikatra.”

“You must be an elf. Nice to meet you.”

The one who introduced herself last was an incredibly beautiful woman. She had grey-silver hair, emerald-colored eyes, and a certain mature charm. With her teacup in hand, she looked like she came out of a painting. If the teacup plate from her hand hadn’t hit the beastman girl’s head, she would have looked even more beautiful.

“I see, you’re Master’s... huhu, nice to meet you. Take good care of Master.”

“Um, I’m asking just to be sure, but is the Master you’re referring to Loretta?”

“That’s right.”

Shikatra nodded her head like it was nothing. So it was true. A mere Floor Shop owner was being called Master. If I took into account the similarity between the crystal key to the Fairy Garden and the mansion key...

“Is Loretta the Master of the guild, Fairy Garden?”

“That’s exactly right, Human. Though, Fairy Garden is a bit different from the guilds created by explorers. In fact...”

“It’s a guild for those who manage the dungeon, right?”

“Yes. The First Dungeon has a total of five administrative guilds, and Fairy Garden is one of them. It’s named after this area we’re in.”

The dwarf, Lotang, nodded his head with satisfaction. It was as I thought. Administrators who managed the Floor Shops and parts of the Residential Area... although I was curious about their

identities, I did not ask since they did most likely would not answer. The beastman girl's initial hostility seemed to have subsided as she scanned me and said, "My name is Loka, nyan."

"Nice to meet you, Lokanyan."

"It's not Lokanyan, nyan! It's just Loka, nyan!"

Of course, I was just joking. Her reaction was exactly what I wanted as well. Watching me nod my head in satisfaction, the hobgoblin Eladel spoke as he stared at me fixedly.

"I assume you're here to meet Master?"

"No, Loretta just said something good will happen if I use the key at the spring. But since I'm here, I do want to meet Loretta."

"What was Master embarrassed about, even after handing him the key..."

While Eladel was murmuring to himself, the elf Shikatra explained in his stead.

"You see the path there, right? Don't stray off the path and keep going. Remember, you have to think of Master as you walk. If you follow where the fairies lead you, you might not be able to come back."

“Just what is this place?”

“Mm, it’s not the material realm. It’s closer to the faerie realm. So make sure you stay on your guard, young man.”

“With your dazed face, the fairies will trick you, nyan! Be careful, nyan!”

Did they not know about my ability? I was an Elementalist, and had skills that let all spirits see me in favorable light. The fairies I met on my way didn’t try to trick me. Loka’s worry was probably for nothing.

While I was following the path, I suddenly remembered about Peika. She disappeared after being dragged off by the elementals and fairies.

‘Mmm, well, I could always unsummon her, so I guess I can just leave her be.’

Thinking casually, I walked deeper and deeper into this garden of the fairies.

## Chapter 73. Fairy Garden (6)

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As I walked onward thinking about Loretta, the trees became denser and the number of elementals decreased. The sound of birds chirping rang out along with the cries of other animals. It was truly a mystical place.

In an instant, the forest's atmosphere changed again. The warm, peaceful atmosphere became more uneasy.

‘I’m here.’

Thinking like that instinctively and pushing myself through the trees, I found a small log cabin in the woods. It was almost as if it popped out of a fairytale. I approached the cabin and knocked on its door. Loretta's answer was swift and concise.

[Not working. I'm resting. Go away, and don't come back.]

“Loretta?”

[Kyak!]

Crashing and clattering sounds rang out from the inside, followed by an absolute silence. I was lost for words as the silence continued, before the door quietly and slowly opened.

From inside, two golden eyes peeked out. So Loretta had golden

eyes. They were truly big and beautiful.

“Uh, mm, Shin-nim.”

“Hello, Loretta.”

“Uu, uuu... Pretend you didn’t hear what I said.”

“That would depend on Loretta’s reception.”

“... Come in.”

The inside of the cabin was exceedingly normal. Although the living room was too small to even be called a living room, it was extremely clean. Other than a tea cup on a table, there was nothing inside that seemed like decorations. I could see two rooms, but they couldn’t have been big considering the size of the cabin from the outside. Unlike the grandiose title of Fairy Garden’s Master, the house was humble.

Loretta was the only special part about it.

Perhaps realizing that I was staring at her, Loretta blinked her big eyes and asked.

“Um, do I look that different?”



Loretta from the Floor Shop was an extremely lively girl. However, other than her voice, Loretta's real self did not share any similarities with the Loretta I knew. The Loretta I was looking at right now was a beauty exuding nobility and elegance.

“N-No, that's...”

She was an incredibly beautiful elf with snow-white skin, and was tall enough to look me in the eye. Considering that my height was over 190 cm, she was also just as tall.

However, her perfect body proportions did not make her height stand out. In fact, it added to her mystical appearance. Her slender waist, her arms, her legs, and her voluptuous chest all seemed to suggest that she wasn't human. After all, a human couldn't have a figure of such proportions.

Her big, golden eyes, shapely nose, and pink-colored full lips made her look like a piece of art. Her flushed cheeks made her look healthy, and her long-ears added a magical charm to her otherworldly atmosphere.

Her long, soft black hair flowed down to her waist, tied loosely by a ribbon, revealing its abundance. She looked like she just woke up, as she was wearing a see-through nightgown. Because of it, I didn't know where to direct my gaze. Her figure was shown fully, and her half-opened gown revealed her... uuuuu!

“L-Loretta, can you wear some proper clothes?”

“Yes? Kyak!”

After hearing what I said, Loretta looked down at herself and screamed. She then hastily ran into her room. Before I could talk with her, wearing her usual clothes, a bit more time had to pass.

“I, I apologize, Shin-nim. I’ve shown you a shameful sight.”

“No, not at all. In fact, I would have wanted to see more of... hiik!”

“That will be 10 million gold, customer.”

“Sorry.”

Because she had an incredibly embarrassed expression, I had no choice but to apologize.

“The reason I invited Shin-nim to this place is...”

“Like I said, I’m sorry.”

“The reason I invited Shin-nim to this place is...!”

Loretta didn’t seem to want to accept my apology, as she continued without facing me. I was at a loss for what to do. Although she looked completely different on the outside, because

the way she acted was the same, I couldn't help but smile as I watched her.

“As you know, it will be convenient to find a place to stay in the dungeon's Residential Area. At the Residential Area, you can sell equipment or consumables, or buy items you need from other explorers. There are places where you can relieve fatigue built up from the dungeon as well.”

She picked up the teacup in front of her and took a sip. Although she looked graceful, her head was still turned away from me. She was very cute.

“Although Shin-nim had no problem climbing alone thus far, it won't stay like that forever. There is no place like the Residential Area to get closer to other worlds' explorers. When you make friends here, even though you might not party with them as you climb the dungeon, they might invite you to Event Dungeons or Raids, or vice versa.”

“I see.”

“But Shin-nim should know, if you entered the mansion. Unless Shin-nim gets authorized using a Mana Stone, Shin-nim cannot freely go back and forth between the dungeon and the Residential Area.”

“Right.”

“But finding a Mana Stone that’s suitable for a Special Mansion like Marianne’s Garden probably will not be possible for a while. So...”

Loretta hesitated slightly, then continued.

“So if Shin-nim is okay with it, I’d like to invite Shin-nim as Fairy Garden’s temporary guild member.”

“Yes?”

“Temporary guild member.”

She faced me. From the front, her explosive beauty came into view once again and made me flustered.

Pointy ears, thin facial lines, a sharp nose and long neck. Such features made her look nonhuman, but they only added to her charm.

Her sparkling golden eyes shone as if something was lighting it up from inside. I felt like staring into it would suck me in.

“A temporary guild member is... Shin-nim?”

“Ah, yeah. Continue your explanation.”

“... Huhu.”

Loretta's expression became slightly haughty. Damn, this elf found out!

“Why were you staring at me so fixedly, Shin-nim?”

“It's nothing, nothing at all.”

“Huhung... huhu. Why were you looking at me so much? Why?”

Loretta's eyes darted around my face as she spoke with a humming voice. Even if you do that, I won't tell you honestly! Saying that I was too enchanted by her beautiful eyes... Unless I wanted to confess to her and get rejected, I couldn't say it out loud.

She continued making fun of me, trying to get me to confess, but because she lost her mystical beauty the more she did so, I was able to regain my composure. Eventually, she clicked her tongue and continued.

“A temporary guild member isn't anything special. It's just someone who's registered with Fairy Garden's guild area and can thus stay here.”

“Ah, so that's why...”

“Yes. Although you can't become a full-fledged guild member

because of your status as an explorer, it can at least help you go back and forth between the dungeon and the mansion since Shin-nim cannot get authorized for now. Of course, it won't be for free. In exchange for becoming a temporary guild member, Shin-nim will have to help with the paperwork of Fairy Garden's Master..."

"Mmm... but Loretta."

"Yes?"

Loretta stopped her explanation in the middle and blinked her eyes as she looked at me. Since she already looked so excited to put me to work, I delivered the fatal blow.

"I already got authorized. For Marianne's Garden."

"... Yes?"

"I got authorized. There was an Event Raid on Earth. I got the entire corpse of an Event Raid boss, and it had a Mana Stone."

"Ah... is that so...?"

Loretta shoulders drooped. I didn't know for sure, but her long ears seemed to have drooped as well. With a slightly disappointed expression, she spoke.

"Then, that's good. Yep, it's good... Stupid Shin-nim."

I definitely heard it. She called me stupid. It wasn't like obtaining a Mana Stone was my fault. I answered Loretta with a bitter smile.

“You must have a lot of work to do. So much that you need an assistant.”

“No, that was just a preten... Ah, nothing! Yeah, I have lots!”

“There's not much I can do if you're busy with work, but if you have time, come visit my mansion. I haven't even looked around it yet, but I'm sure there's at least a teahouse where Loretta and I can drink tea.”

Loretta's ears perked up. As she blinked her golden eyes, she asked.

“I can go visit?”

“Of course.”

“T-Then... can you add me to your friend list?”

“That's possible!?”

I shot up from my seat in surprise. Loretta covered her mouth with her hands and snickered.

“Of course! We also belong to the dungeon.”

“Really, what exactly is Loretta’s identity?”

“That’s a secret, for now. But I hope I can tell you one day.”

“Will you?”

At my question, Loretta smiled lightly and nodded her head. Placing her index finger on my mouth, she quietly whispered.

Although her fingers were tickling me, I couldn’t open my mouth. Her golden eyes, which seemed to suck me in, were staring right at me.

“One day, to you only. It’ll be a secret to anyone else.”

I left Loretta’s log cabin. Loretta saw me off at the door.

“Take care, Shin-nim. Make sure to answer me when I message you.”

“Don’t worry. I’m off then.”

“Ah, um, Shin-nim.”



When I was about to turn away, Loretta stopped me. She held both of my hands, while her eyes wandered around me without being able to look at me directly.

“My real appearance. Is it strange?”

“You’re saying that now?”

“B-But... you didn’t say it properly before.”

She really was a cute noona. For someone who had a noble charm on top of incredible beauty, she really should be more confident in herself. I thought she knew that by the way she acted, but I didn’t think she’d waver all the way at the end.

Of course, I felt that this made her even more charming. As such, I decided to tell her how I felt without a hint of deceit.

“Not at all. You’re incredibly beautiful. I was almost entranced.”

“Hik!”

Loretta made a strange sound and plunked down on the ground. Girls really were weak to compliments. At her picture-like reaction, I snickered and turned away.

“I’m going. Message me.”

“Y-Yes. I’ll message you, I’ll definitely message you! Even tomorrow!”

“I thought you were busy... I should call Peika too... Eh?”

Strange. When I tried to pass on my intent through our mental connection, it was severed in the middle. Thinking our contract had been severed, my heart skipped a beat, but that wasn’t it. The contract was still there. What was wrong? Why couldn’t I communicate with her? When I tried to unsummon her in confusion, a series of messages rang out in my ear.

[Your contracted elemental, Peika, and the fairies she was playing with discovered a hidden area of ‘Fairy Garden!']

[An Event Dungeon, ‘Frozen Elemental’s Prison,’ has been created! As it was discovered by a contracted elemental, the contracted master will automatically receive the right to enter the dungeon! Would you like to enter the dungeon? This dungeon can only be entered by you.]

[A quest has appeared!]

[Quest – Save the Contracted Elemental!]

Description – While playing with the fairies and elementals at your request, your contracted elemental opened the entrance to Fairy Garden’s sealed hidden area, almost as if guided by fate.

The moment the hidden area was opened, the contracted elemental was sucked into the hidden area along with other fairies and elementals. Quickly save her! Otherwise, the mad ice elemental may freeze your elemental along with the other elementals and fairies!]

... What!?

## Chapter 74. The Elementalist That Sealed, The Elementalist That Saves (1)

---

“Cold Protection Robe, Return magic scroll, Flame Enchant magic scroll...”

“No, I don’t need a Return magic scroll. I already have the Return skill.”

Loretta, who began to take out all sorts of items seemingly out of nowhere, put away the Return magic scroll after hearing what I said. Although I was watching her with my own eyes, I couldn’t see where she put away the scroll.

Looking over the items she picked out, she nodded her head, then shook it again. She then took out a book and a small chest from the pile.

“You said you had a crossbow, right? This is Crossbow Marksmanship. This item is sold starting from the 30th floor, and if you learn Crossbow Marksmanship with this skill book, it will be easier to shoot down any enemies. This is Flame Bolt Cartridge. The bolts placed inside it receive the fire attribute and explode when they collide with something... This is a limited item sold from the 47th floor and above, and only to those who completed a particular achievement, so make sure you keep it a secret from others. Remember, it’s a secret!”

It turns out that Floor Master Battle Vouchers and Party Member Scarecrows that I’d been buying were also items only those who

completed a particular achievement could buy. Although I had the qualifications to buy them, it seemed I had stretched it a bit when I let Ren purchase them. Though, Ren also obtained the qualifications after succeeding in a solo raid.

“I understand. So, how much is it for the Cold Protection Robe and the Flame Enchant magic scroll?”

“Yes, it’s 600... No, 450,000 gold.”

It was an enormous discount. Although I sent Loretta an inquisitive, ‘will that be fine?’ glance, she simply held out her hands, asking me for my money. In the end, Loretta was helping me in various ways.

“Here, 450,000 gold.”

“Yes, thank you for the purchase, customer.”

“Loretta, can you really sell them for this price?”

“Shin-nim, this place is my area, where no prying eyes can reach. Plus, if the hidden area that just opened is what I think it is, it really is a dangerous place that I’d love to prevent you from going to. If it’s just this much, I’m sure the oldie... I mean, Lord, would allow it too.”

Although I felt a little uneasy, I decided to accept her help. Peika was in danger. I didn’t have time to loiter around. I first learned

the Crossbow Marksmanship skill.

[You learned Crossbow Marksmanship. You can properly handle crossbows to damage the enemy. As the skill level increases, your aim and critical hit rate will increase.]

“Shin-nim, if things get difficult, you have to find elemental-nim and use Return. If Shin-nim dies, it will be the same thing as Shin-nim’s vitality becoming zero, but the elemental-nim won’t be unsummoned and will completely perish.”

Loretta warned me as I put on the Cold Protection Robe. As her golden eyes staring at me emphasized the seriousness of her words, I could only nod my head.

“Be careful. A crazed elemental is extremely dangerous. Although I wasn’t present at the time, even the Fairy Garden’s Elementalist didn’t have the confidence to subdue the crazed elemental without killing her, and could only seal her in that place... Even Shin-nim might not be strong enough to do anything against her. Remember, if Shin-nim’s vitality becomes zero, elemental-nim will perish.”

“I know. I don’t want to lose Peika either. I’m off, then.”

“Come back safely with elemental-nim. ... And.”

I poured the skeleton bone bolts first into the cartridge I just bought and then put them all in my inventory. As long as there were bolts in my inventory, my crossbow would automatically reload itself.

When I finished checking over my equipment and raised my head, Loretta was almost right in front of my face. Seeing her frighteningly perfect face up close, my body became stiff on its own. A pathetic sound came out of my mouth.

“H, Huuk?”

“D-Don’t misunderstand, okay? Don’t misunderstand.”

With that, she placed her hand on my left cheek, and pressed her lips against my other cheek.

[You received the Queen Elf’s Blessing. For the next 5 hours, you receive the following effects: You are protected against all low-rank and mid-rank status effects. You can maintain your consciousness for 5 minutes after falling into a half-dead state. Your luck increases by 100. All members of the Faerie race will see you favorably.]

“W... W-W-W-W-Wha...”

“B-Blessing, it’s a blessing. I gave you a blessing to wish you safe

return! So don't misunderstand!"

Loretta's cheeks became bright red. However, she couldn't be redder than me who had just gotten kissed. I could feel my cheeks burning, and I was frozen stiff as if Loretta's silvery fragrance consumed my body. Just when I was thinking I might suffocate from being unable to let out my breath, I barely managed to exhale.

"Queen Elf it said... You were married?"

"Second Bullet of Destruction!"

"Kahak!"

With a burning sensation in my stomach, I collapsed.

"I'm still a young maiden! Queen just refers to my status. How can Shin-nim say that to me!?"

"Y-You could have just... said that..."

"... Shin-nim? Shin-nim... Shin-nim!?"

My vitality almost became zero before I could even go to Peika's rescue.





[You entered an Event Dungeon.]

The moment I entered the Event dungeon, a tremendous cold swept over me. Even with the Cold Protection Robe, the chill that reached my skin seemed to want to rip me to pieces.

“Ku, it’s so cold here... Is this a snow field?”

How could the warm Fairy Garden have an area this cold? I took out my spear and gasped as I felt the metallic handle of my spear turn cold. I could feel the chill even through my gauntlet.

“I should use Flame Enchant first.”

When I brought the Flame Enchant scroll I bought from Loretta to the Black Earthen Spear, the scroll instantly burned up, and, at the same time, made my spear glow with a reddish aura. I could feel the heat emanating off from it. With the warmth coming from the spear, I felt much better. By rubbing my cheeks on the spear shaft, I could forget the cold for a moment.

With my improved condition from Flame Enchant, I tightly grabbed the spear with my hands and looked around. There was snow as far as my eyes could see, and the trees that I saw here and there had snow flowers instead of leaves. Although I was worried about Peika and wanted to hurry, I knew rushing things would only make it worse.

I closed my eyes and focused. Thankfully, after I came into this space, the connection between Peika and me had reestablished itself. However, I still couldn't unsummon her or recall her.

“Peika, can you hear me?”

[Master! You came to find me!]

Whew. It seemed she was okay. Feeling relieved, I asked.

“How's the situation? Are you in danger?”

[It's so cold. I'm fine, but the kids I came with might freeze to death. Master, hurry up.]

“You didn't meet any other elementals?”

[Mm? No, but I found lots of strange monsters. Be careful, Master!]

Strange monsters? When I opened my mouth to ask her for more details, I felt a bone-chilling feeling and rolled forward.

“Ptui! Argh, snow!”

“Kuhung!”

As I complained while spitting out the snow that had gotten in my mouth, someone, or something, had replied. To secure my safety, I first rolled forward once more before I got up and turned around. There, an almost 3 meter tall humanoid monster was looking down on me. Its entire body was covered with white fur, while a small horn protruded from its head.

“Kaooooo!”

“... Hm, you’re quite big.”

I casually complimented it and strengthened my grip on my spear. If it was a sociable creature, I hoped it would become bashful and compliment my helmet or spear. Unfortunately, it swung its black claws, the only non-white part of its body, towards me.

“Kuk!”

“Kuhuuung!”

“Kuhuuaaaang!”

Although I had expected as much, there really was another one! At the same time the one facing me attacked me, the other monster suddenly popped up behind me, aiming for my back. Without a shred of hesitation, I charged towards the one I was facing. Although I normally would have spent more time to feel it out, I was currently facing two mysterious enemies. I had to take care of

one first!

“Ha!”

“Kuhak!”

The Heroic Strike, which I thrust out with a spirited shout, drew a trajectory of white light as it pierced through the monster’s neck. Because of Flame Enchant, the moment the spear went into its neck, its whole body burned up in flames. As they were monsters living in the snowy fields, it seemed fire damage was especially effective against them.

The Heroic Strike just now took about 15% of my HP and MP, but managed to finish the monster off. If that was the case, I could fight the remaining monster without having to use Heroic Strike!

“Kuhuuuuung!”

“Huu... Hap!”

Right now, I didn’t have Peika, nor could I call upon other elementals. In short, I couldn’t use my power as an Elementalist. I had to rely on my spearmanship and martial arts techniques. However, I became more spirited the more dangerous the situation was. A few strands of my hair left unprotected by the cover of my robe froze. With this, I found out the monster’s attacks had the power to freeze its opponent.

I lowered my posture and charged towards it. It seemed to be wary of my spear, as it backed away, but it was too slow. By the time it found a weakness in its defense, my spear was already cutting off its left arm.

“Kaaaaaa!”

About a third of its arm became severed, dripping blue blood on the snowy field, which instantly froze. For an instant, I doubted my eyes. It wasn't because the snow was cold. It was its blood's low temperature that caused it to crystalize. In other words, I had to be wary of its blood as well.

“Just what are these things...? Hap!”

In my eyes, the damage I might take from the cold was more dangerous than direct attacks. Especially its left arm that kept spewing out blue blood, it was the most annoying thing to deal with. I had to completely sever it and use the flame energy in my spear to scorch it. So that's exactly what I did.

“Kiaaaaaa!”

The spear I thrust out with an ample amount of mana made its left arm drop on the ground, which then disappeared into particles. I held my spear a bit closer to the tip and charged towards it, hitting away the fluttering droplets of blood. Then, I smacked the severed area of its left arm with my spear.

“Kiaaaak!”

“Die!”

I heard the sizzle of my spearhead scorching its wound. It made me... a bit hungry. It even smelled nice.

“Huk, I can’t!”

“Kuoooooooo!”

Using its cry as a background music, I heightened my concentration and managed to completely scorch its wound. Using the moment where it stumbled after losing its arm, I shot my spear forward. As if my spear was being sucked in, it stabbed at the monster’s neck and managed to deal damage by penetrating its thick skin.

[Critical Hit!]

“Kiaaaak!”

“Hu, you’re almost dead!”

After 5 minutes of carefully stabbing its neck, I managed to completely pierce through its neck. With a strange roaring sound,

the monster collapsed.

[You obtained Yeti's Blood.]

[You obtained 5,500 gold.]

“Huu... so this guy is a yeti.”

Yeti. Although my fight with them had ended, the fight wasn't perfectly clean, nor was it satisfying.

I was in my worst condition and my opponents were the worst as well. The yetis entire body and blood were weapons, and they even had high defense. Not to mention, the snowy field environment and its harsh, cold winds made it hard for me to even open my eyes and maintain my balance. My feet also kept sinking into the snow. The moment I lost my focus, I could receive a fatal blow. This was truly the worst environment for battle.

However, it also was the best place to grow myself. I was in similar situations when I was training with father as well. The sense of accomplishment was higher the harsher the environment was for practicing martial arts.

Yup, I'd think of this as training. Otherwise, I wouldn't have the will to continue on in this place.

“Alright... let’s go!”

After resolving myself, I stepped forward, holding my warm Black Earthen Spear in my embrace. The connection between Peika and me was telling me where to go.

However... there was something strange.

“What is it...? Besides Peika, there’s another...”

In the same direction Peika was in, something that wasn’t Peika seemed to be calling me.

Something connected to me by a deep bond, something that had to be with me.

Led on by the unknown calling, I walked onward with a small suspicion in my heart. I knew the answer to my suspicion would be at the end of this snowy plain.



## Chapter 75. The Elementalist That Sealed, The Elementalist That Saves (2)

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“Kuhuuuung!”

“Haaap!”

About 20 minutes after that. While walking through this harsh Event Dungeon, there was one important thing I learned. It was that rather than using 5 minutes to fight with the yetis, it was better to use Heroic Strike to kill it in one blow, then recover my mana while walking with Peruta Circuit.

As strong as the yetis were, they didn't appear all too often. However, when they did, they would never appear alone. Regardless, if I used Heroic Strike to kill the yetis I encountered, I found that I would not encounter more until my mana was already filled up.

In addition, as Peruta Circuit took in mana from the atmosphere and circulated it inside me, I was less affected by the surrounding temperature. In order to block the cold that even the Cold Protection Robe could not fully guard against, I desperately circulated Peruta Circuit.

[Peruita Circuit became level 5! Circulating Peruta Circuit will collect more mana, and its speed of circulation increases!]

“Ooooooh.”

My theory that training was best done in desperate situations was proven to be true. Slightly frustrated, but happy, I continued to frantically circulate Peruta Circuit. In my hand was a crossbow. Since Peika wasn't around to deal long-ranged attacks, I had to use the crossbow to fill her role. At the same time, I saw a yeti standing in the distance.

“Kiaaaaa!”

“Alright, I might as well train my Crossbow Marksmanship skill.”

I was practically overflowing with skeleton bones, and the yeti's large body was the perfect practice target. I held the crossbow up and aimed it at its eye. The crossbolt reloaded automatically and shot out, emanating a red aura. It hit the yeti's arm and exploded. My aim had been off.

“This is hard. I'll have to learn how to aim better.”

That said, as the weapon, dropped by a 30th floor named monster, and the Flame Bolt Cartridge were both the highest ranked items I owned, the damage they dealt was certainly higher than the swing of my spears. Although the damage couldn't compare to when I focused and stabbed with my spear, the yeti would undoubtedly hit me if I tried.

After finding out that the bolt worked on the yetis, I opened my inventory and counted the number of bolts in the cartridge. It seemed the cartridge had a space expansion magic as it fit all 1,577 of the bone bolts.

“Eat this and die!”

I instantly started to infinitely shoot with my Silver Bone Crossbow. The bone bolts flew out with close to no delay in between each shot, and exploded on the yeti, who was unable to dodge them. Feeling the continuous recoil as the bolts flew out, I felt like I was using a machine gun. This weapon was even better than I thought!

[Low-rank Crossbow Marksmanship became level 2. Your precision and critical hit chance increase.]

“Ooh, skill level rose too.”

Dangerous. I was about to forget about my original goal and just keep shooting arrows! The yeti, whose fur was scorched and bled profusely, let out an enraged roar as it charged at me. On its way, it woke up two more yetis. These yetis really were never alone.

“I don’t think I can kill you with just the crossbow yet... but your friends can take some bolts too!”

I held up my crossbow. No matter how strong they were or how they had the power to freeze their opponents, that didn't change the fact that they were still living creatures. It seemed easy to take care of the one bleeding profusely, especially since the bolts' fire attribute scorched its leather, making it easy for arrows to pierce through. This must have been why Loretta sold me the Flame Bolt Cartridge.

[You obtained Yeti's Horn.]

[You obtained 5,800 gold.]

"These guys sure drop various items."

Yeti's Blood, Yeti's Leather, Yeti's Horn. These were the three items the yetis dropped after they were killed. Thinking they couldn't be just trash items, I checked their descriptions, which only labeled them as [material]s. For now, I decided to hold onto them.

[Master, it's getting colder. I feel like something is getting closer.]

"I'm almost there, Peika. Wait just a bit more."

I quickened my pace. With my crossbow in hand, I stayed ready to attack. Not to brag, but I was a quick learner when it came to things that used my body. After a few battles with the crossbow, I

was beginning to understand how to aim to properly hit my targets. The skill level also easily rose to low-rank level 3.

“Kuu, it really is getting colder... Damn, and this strange feeling is getting stronger too...!”

Something was calling me, looking for me desperately. But almost as if something was blocking our communication, the link between us was cut. Even I was getting more and more annoyed.

“Guaaaang!”

“Shut it!”

[Critical Hit!]

Just when I wanted to cry, a yeti popped up and attacked me with its claws. I shot two bolts, hitting its left eye and mouth perfectly. The yeti fell and twitched in pain. I didn't understand. My attacks with level 3 low-rank Crossbow Marksmanship were this strong, but why were the archers I met all so weak? Was it the difference in the quality of our weapons?

Silver Bone Crossbow. It was a much better weapon than I initially thought. The fact that it reloaded automatically made it no different than an automatic rifle.

[... Go... back...!]

“I hear it.”

It was the voice of an elemental! I quickened my pace. The wind got harsher, and less and less yetis appeared. Before I noticed, two hours had passed since I entered the dungeon. I wanted to find Peika and quickly go home.

[Master, it's an elemental! An elemental appeared!]

“Damn it! Talaria!”

[You summoned Talaria. For the next 10 minutes, you can freely fly or walk on air. If flying, you will receive an additional 100 percent increase to your movement speed. Remaining time: 09:59:99]

Although I didn't want to use it because it might freeze me to death, I had no choice now that Peika was in danger. After using Talaria and flying into the air, I flew as fast as possible in the direction of Peika.

The wind blew against my face and tried to pick apart my nose and ears, but I withstood it and went on. I had the Cold Protection Robe and was embracing the Black Earthen Spear. With the added warmth from Queen Elf's Blessing, I could somewhat manage.

[Shaaaaa!]

[Not only elementals, but even a human has come in!]

[This place is the Frozen Elementals' Prison. It's not a place a human can enter!]

How far did I fly? Crystals of ice that had started appearing in the air talked to me as they crashed into me. Although my HP didn't go down by much, the places in my Cold Protection Robe where the ice crystals crashed became white and frozen. Elementals, these crystals were elementals!

“Listen to me. I have to save my elemental!”

[Elementalist?]

[Don't listen to him. His words are too sweet!]

[Don't listen, don't listen!]

“Don't attack me! I have no intention of attacking elementals!”

[Don't listen, don't listen!]

[I like him.]

[I said don't listen!]

Thankfully, Loretta's blessing helped one of the elementals quickly come to my side. I carefully touched the ice crystal that came near my hand. Perhaps because it was no longer hostile towards me, I didn't feel cold from touching it.

[He's warm. I feel like I'm melting.]

[He's from the outside! The traitor's bloodline!]

"I don't know what you mean by traitor, but I'm not him! Please, everyone, stop attacking!"

[If I don't attack you, will you get me out of here?]

"Yes, I will. As long as you don't hurt others."

[I won't! I won't hurt anyone!]

[He's going to betray us. Just like everyone else has in the past.]

[But he isn't them.]

I didn't really care. Even as they talked amongst themselves, I was flying through the air as fast as I could. Before I noticed,



another ice crystal came next to me. Although more ice crystals appeared in my surroundings, none of them blindly attacked me like before.

[This person is an Elementalist, a person who cares for elementals.]

[The person who trapped that child was also an Elementalist.]

[He had no qualification.]

[He had no qualification!]

[He was the one at fault, but he trapped that child here with the rest of us.]

[He locked the door so no one can come in.]

[But why did the door open?]

I found her.

“Peika!”

[Master! Master!]

After seeing me, Peika let out shouts of joy. However, I couldn't

be entirely happy. Although Peika was unhurt, there were fairies and elementals hiding behind her, who were shaking because of the harsh environment.

Not to mention, Peika was currently fighting something. Because my mana wasn't being drained, it had taken me awhile to notice. So that was it. This place was the Spirit Realm, a place where Peika could freely use mana without having to rely on my own.

Although Peika's lightning ripped apart the freezing winds, a breath mixed with ice equally blocked her lightning from continuing. The enemy was strong.

[I can't do it alone, Master!]

“Wait!”

I instantly descended to her location. At the same time, the thing that was attacking Peika with its breath looked back at me. My heart dropped for a moment. A body bigger than human's, mane that let out silver light, a face that frowned as if it was in pain, and crimson madness that ruled its eyes.

“A crazed elemental...!”

That silver wolf was the owner of this space and the core of the sealing, a crazed elemental. It was an elemental that had developed enough to materialize! Even Peika couldn't materialize yet!

“Peika, come here!”

[No, I have to protect these children!]

“Guys, can you help me? They’re elementals just like you, and fairies who are also of the same race. Can you protect them?”

[The fairies only watched us as we were sealed.]

[The elementals thoughtlessly flew around the Fairy Garden.]

[But they’re still our kind. I don’t like you, but I will help them.]

While a few of the ice crystals sparkled and flew toward the fairies and elementals, I landed next to Peika. As Talaria was still active, my feet weren’t buried under the snow. Rather, they were standing on the air above the snow.

[Krrrrr...]

“I see, you’re a special elemental. Just like Peika...”

There were elementals with special powers, elementals who were acknowledged as unique, permitted eternal life, and given the ability to grow. Although Elementalists wanted to form contracts with such elementals, the rule that they could only form contracts with elementals their souls were connected to was always valid. Just because they discovered a special elemental, it didn’t mean

they could form contracts with them.

Even so, there were Elementalists that employed all sorts of different methods to try and form contracts with them. Not one of them managed to succeed throughout long history of Elementalists, and everyone knew what would happen to the elementals when they failed. They would always go mad.

Although it was the Elementalists that were at fault, the elementals paid the price. It was unfair.

[Krrr....]

Looking at the wolf crouching as it revealed its silver teeth, I pulled out my spear. The ice crystals then flew toward me.

[Will you kill this poor child?]

[Don't! You can't kill this child!]

[It's dangerous. I'll protect you.]

“Don't worry. I'm just going to play with it until it regains its sanity.”

I confidently proclaimed my intention to the ice crystals and aimed my spear at the wolf. I didn't like punishment. It was the same for my father. Although he had thrown me into all sorts of

dangerous situations, he had never beaten in mercilessly. Although he had almost killed me during our spars, he had never beaten me because I did something wrong. As such, I never forgot father's teaching method, because I vowed to get my revenge on him the same way.

That said, it was true that beating was the best medicine for the crazy.

[Krrrrr..... Kuaaaang!]

“Alright, come! I'll play with you until you're satisfied! Peika, assist me! Ice elementals, you guys help me too!”

[Okay, Master!]

[I'm going to trust him.]

[If you kill that child, I will kill you.]

At the same time the elementals gathered around me, Peika floated into the air and shot out lightning with her body. She opened her folding fan and covered her mouth. Her black hair fluttering in the wind was incredibly beautiful.

[You better get ready, you mutt!]

[What should we do?]

“Simple. Just protect me from the freezing energy.”

[We aren't strong enough.]

“I'll give you strength.”

I popped open a Mana Potion. Because the liquid inside started to freeze, I quickly gulped it down. I ended up drinking a slushy; It was actually quite tasty.

I closed my eyes and shared my mana with the elementals around me. Elemental Control. It was the skill necessary for me to use Elemental Tempest, and also allowed an Elementalist without his contracted elemental to use an Elementalist's abilities. It allowed me to employ free elementals that existed in the world in exchange for my mana!

[I'm getting stronger.]

[How mystical, he's an amazing Elementalist.]

[He's a Hero.]

[He's a Hero!]

[Guoooooooo!]

[Master, it's coming!]

“I'm ready.”

I gripped my spear tightly. Thanks to Flame Enchant, the flame energy coming from the Black Earthen Spear seemed to be heating up my entire body. I continued with this vigor, and shouted out.

“Let's start by beating you once!”

## Chapter 76. The Elementalist That Sealed, The Elementalist That Saves (3)

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The spear I thrust out vigorously missed its mark rather simply. I could only confirm that the elemental was extremely fast. After dodging my spear thrust, the elemental opened its mouth and exhaled freezing energy.

“I’ll leave it to you guys!”

[We can block it!]

[It’s possible now!]

It seemed to want to make me back off, but with the protection of dozens of ice elementals, I charged forward. Then, I thrust my spear at the elemental’s open mouth.

[Kiyaaaaa!]

“Kuk!?”

[Block!]

Even if it was materialized, as it was a spiritual being, it seemed it had no problem using its ability with a mouth injury. Even though blue blood flowed down from its mouth, the freezing energy from its breath got stronger and swept over me, past the protection of



the ice elementals. However, Peika came to help before I was turned into an ice statue.

[Thunder Arrow!]

[Kiyaaaa!]

Peika's lightning arrows struck the elemental wolf's body. The crazed elemental was an ice elemental, which had a base property of water. Peika, who controlled lightning, was naturally stronger against its element. Even if her strength was weaker than a crazed elemental, she could still deal a great amount of damage. Meanwhile, I took out my crossbow and shot my bolts out consecutively. When they hit its mouth, they exploded, causing it to stagger backwards.

[Strong!]

[Lightning elemental is so pretty. I want to make her my bride.]

“Stop chattering and protect me properly!”

With my low-rank Crossbow Marksmanship, I couldn't deal a fatal blow. After shooting out a round of bolts, I hung the crossbow back on my waist, and pouring bountiful mana into my Black Earthen Spear, I thrust forward with its extended spear blade. Receiving Peika's endless lightning arrows and my spear thrust at the same time, the crazed elemental's eyes burned even redder.

[Human... Elemental...!]

“Eh!?”

The sudden voice made my heart thump. In the brief moment that my attack became loose, the elemental pounced on me. Its sharp teeth shone with a silver light.

[Ah, it's dangerous!]

[We can't block physical attacks.]

[Run!]

“Kuk! Dragon Skin... Ah, I already used it!”

Something was wrong. I couldn't move my body properly. My body wouldn't listen to my commands. Unfortunately, I had already used Orc Lord's Warcry, Dragon Skin, and Dark Thunder Explosion in the three boss raids I ran today. As such, there wasn't much I could do.

I urgently poured as much mana as I could into the elementals protecting me, strengthening them. The light shining from the elementals became brighter and an armor of ice covered the armor I was already wearing.



[You mastered low-rank Spirit Aura! You can infuse elementals into your defensive equipment, not just your weapon, granting a reinforcing aura!]

[You learned mid-rank Spirit Aura! Your Spirit Aura will be reinforced by a strengthened attribute of your elemental. While using Spirit Aura, the Elementalist will be able to wield low-rank elemental magic.]

I shouted out instinctively.

“Ice Shackles!”

[Kuung!]

The crazed elemental froze while baring its fangs at me. From the earth, several hands made of ice had popped up and stopped her movements. Of course, as it was low-rank elemental magic, it would not last long.

“You, do you like judo? You do? Got it!”

[Kuuung!]

Helmet, boots, armor, gauntlet. The ice elementals had dyed my equipment white. I reached forward with my gauntlet, which could now freeze people by just glazing them, and grabbed its front leg. At the same time, the crazed elemental broke out of the ice

shackles.

I jumped toward it and threw it on the ground!

[Kuaaaaang!]

[Now, Thunder Spear!]

Peika's sharp scream created a 2-meter-long thick lightning. Without a shred of hesitation, Peika threw the lightning at the elemental that I had thrown down.

[Critical Hit!]

[Kuuuuang!]

With a roar, it let out an enormous amount of freezing energy from its body. The ice elementals that were infused in my armor screamed.

[Too cold!]

[I feel like I'll perish!]

I gritted my teeth and poured more mana into them. However,

my mana had reached its limit as well. Damn, did I have to run away using Talaria? However, just when I was thinking that, Talaria had become unsummoned.

I was in danger.

“Since it’s come to this, I can use Diehard and...”

Bracing myself for my HP falling below 3%, I tightly gripped my spear and circulated Peruta Circuit to give the elementals some mana. It was then that the lights emitted by the ice elementals became brighter and my HP, which was falling from the freezing energy, stopped.

[You mastered low-rank Elemental Control! All elementals in existence will see you in favorable light and will listen to you well.]

[You learned mid-rank Elemental Control! It becomes easier to draw out the potential of your contracted elemental. You can more easily control free elementals.]

“Peika!”

[Leave it to me, Master!]

Above my head, Peika let out a radiant light. I could feel her

presence growing, and even the crazed elemental stopped attacking for a moment. A change I had not expected was happening. Unable to resist, I looked up. As my heart beat faster, I could tell she had gone through a qualitative change.

Golden crystals floated down from the sky like snow, while Peika slowly floated above the earth.

Peika had succeeded in materializing.

[You mastered low-rank Elemental Contract! You can draw out more of your contracted elemental's original power!]

[You learned mid-rank Elemental Contract! Your contracted elementals with the ability to materialize can do so, but use more mana while materialized. The strength of all skills that use elementals increases greatly. The number of elementals you can form a contract with increases by one.]

[You dare try to make my Master into an ice statue, you're going to get a beating, you doggy!]

The folding fan she always held in her hand had transformed into a lightning whip. Peika, who had materialized as a girl about 10 years old, swung the whip down at the elemental. Like a lightning bolt, the whip cut through the air and slashed the elemental's abdomen. In that instant, a voice rang out.

[It... hurts...!]

“Wait!”

I yelled hurriedly. Peika looked back at me with a curiousity. Unlike her normal 20 cm self, she looked much more charming after having materialized as a human girl. However, now wasn't the time to admire her looks.

I urgently ran in front of Peika and checked the elemental's appearance. Its eyes were still dyed red, but I had not misheard it. That was a young girl's voice.

“You, did you say that?”

[It hurts...! It hurts, it hurts!]

The elemental shot up and pounced on me. I raised my hand and stopped Peika from lashing out with her whip again. With our strengthened contract, Peika understood what I was thinking.

I concentrated the ice elementals in my gauntlet and reached forward to the elemental. The elemental then opened its mouth and chomped down on my gauntlet.

[Kyak, it hurts! What are you doing!?!]

[We protected you!]

[Why are you trying to kill us, Elementalist!?!]

“Calm down, no one is going to die. Alright, look at me.”

[It hurts...!]

“I’ll make it stop hurting, so look at me.”

At first, I wanted to beat the elemental until it snapped out of its madness. If it didn’t, I would have had no choice but to kill it.

But now, things were a bit different. I had finally found the answer. After Peika materialized and I obtained mid-rank Elemental Contract, things became much clearer.

This child was an elemental that could form a contract with me.

I had felt it. When I had first entered this place, a feeling like something was calling out to me. The voice of an elemental before I reached Peika. Above all, this strong link connecting me with this elemental.

[You won’t hurt me anymore?]

“I won’t. Calm down, and look at me.”



Queen Elf's Blessing was extremely effective. With just my strength alone, I doubted I could calm this elemental. Now that it was exhausted, my power as an Elementalist and Loretta's blessing could suppress its madness.

[Everyone is a liar. You're a liar, too.]

"I'm not lying."

The wolf's mouth slowly opened up, and I took out my gauntlet from inside. It was crushed, making me want to take it to be repaired, but I ignored it for now. Instead, I slowly placed my hand on her head.

Although the elemental growled as if she would go berserk again, her red eyes were slowly getting lighter.

[He tried to tie me against my will.]

"I won't. I don't need to do it forcefully."

[He abandoned me and sealed me.]

"I won't. You don't have to be sealed anymore."

I slowly rubbed her head, and the elemental became calmer. The ice elementals, on the other hand, chattered loudly.

[Is this Elementalist her partner?]

[Wow! That's why he could enter this place!]

[Their wavelengths matched!]

[It's been a while since I've seen an Elementalist, but it's one that can form contracts with two elementals... amazing!]

[Mm, I want to beat her more...]

I ignored the ice elementals, along with Peika who was murmuring disappointedly.

[Warm... are you my contractor?]

“Sorry for making you wait so long.”

[Ah... my consciousness... is coming... back.]

Letting out a low growl, she approached me. Although Peika stepped forward slightly tensely, I didn't think it would be necessary. The red aura in her eyes had disappeared, and was replaced with light blue eyes like the color of the winter sky.

[I remembered... my name. I'm Ruyue.... Daughter of Ice and Snow, Ruyue.]

“You got your name back. That’s great.”

When elementals went mad, they would first lose their names. Then, no one would be able to remember their names. The moment they strayed off the Spirit Realm’s order, they would lose the guide that ascertained their identities.

However, she had just recovered her name. By meeting me, her contractor, she had escaped the madness. I spoke, relieved.

“I’m Kang Shin. Ruyue, will you form a contract with me? We can get out of here together.”

[Really? You’ll form a contract with me?]

“Of course.”

[I want to get out... I want to be with warmth. I want to be with Kang Shin.]

“Come with me. We can be together, forever. Let’s... form a contract.”

[Okay. Let’s form a contract.]

Then, just like always, a fanfare rang out.

[You formed a contract with the ice elemental Ruyue! Your affinity and resistance to the ice element greatly increases!]

[List of Contracted Elementals:

1. Peika – lightning elemental. Unique elemental. Materialized. Locked. First Awakening.
2. Ruyue – ice elemental. Unique elemental. Materialized. Locked. First Awakening.]

[Mid-rank Elemental Contract became level 2! The amount of mana required to maintain two elemental summons decreases!]

[Mid-rank Spirit Mastery became level 4! The abilities of all souls connected to you grows stronger!]

[Quest Success! You obtained 1 skill point! Current skill points: 11]

[Event Dungeon Clear! You satisfied and even shocked the Fairy Garden's fairies who hate hurting elementals, by completely resolving their conflict. You obtained 3 bonus stat points.]

I completed the quest and also cleared the Event Dungeon. Although I didn't receive a reward for killing the boss, it was fine. After all, I obtained the boss herself.

Looking at the scenery melting down around me, I tightly hugged Ruyue in my embrace. Ruyue also closed her eyes and buried her face in my embrace. I slowly rubbed her fur, and suddenly realized something.

The freezing energy that seemed to want to devour me was no longer cold.

## Chapter 77. The Elementalist That Sealed, The Elementalist That Saves (4)

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“Pft! Did you climb the Himalayas or something?”

As soon as I returned, Loretta’s snickering greeted me. Setting aside how Loretta knew about the Himalayas, I sullenly turned my back to her.

“I’m going.”

“Ah, wait! I’m sorry, wait! I’ll wipe your hair!”

Loretta quickly took out a towel, took off my hood, and wiped my hair that was hanging like icicles off the eaves. In the process of her wiping my hair, her body naturally grew closer to my own. In order to ignore the flowery fragrance tickling my nose, I frantically sang the national anthem in my head.

“Huu... There, all done.”

After she finished wiping my head, Loretta backed off with a slightly flushed face. Her breathing was a bit rough too. Just how little did she move, that this much exercise made her gasp for breath...? She seemed to hesitate in that state, then asked me carefully.

“Y-You’ll catch a cold... Would you like to come in? You’ll feel

better once you take a warm bath. I can get you a change of clothes.”

“Uh... That’s...”

Something felt strange. Although I couldn’t explain it, I felt like I shouldn’t do as she suggested. Even though there couldn’t be anything dangerous in her house, I felt my body was in danger. With a worrying feeling that something I had been protecting would be lost, I shook my head.

“No, I’m fine. I might as well take this opportunity to check out my house. I’ll return to the dungeon afterwards.”

“It can’t be helped then... Tsk.”

Loretta clicked her tongue. It was very scary. Putting the towel back in her bosom, she changed the subject and spoke with a brighter expression.

“Congratulations on forming a contract with a new elemental. I didn’t even imagine that the elemental would have matching wavelengths with Shin-nim.”

“Do you know what happened to the Elementalist that made Ruyue go mad?”

This was something I wanted to confirm for certain. Even if it wasn’t now, I wanted to make him pay for it somehow.

“He was the Elementalist who was an owner of one of the other Special Mansions. He obtained the qualification to enter Fairy Garden from a quest reward, but he was punished for making an elemental go mad, losing his qualification to be a dungeon explorer.”

The answer was something I didn't even consider. This was the first time I heard one could lose his qualification as a dungeon explorer. I asked again.

“Then?”

“He died. Along with him, his world completely fell to ruin.”

Because Loretta's voice was too light, I felt fear from it. It was different than when Ellos was talking about his lost comrade. Loretta's voice was completely emotionless, as if what she described was completely normal. Something that she had seen many times, something that was happening even now, and something that would continue to happen many times. She seemed to be describing everyday happenings.

Because I felt like I would come to fear Loretta if she continued, I tried to say something. But no matter what I wanted to say, I couldn't say it, because I was afraid of how Loretta would respond. In the end, this was what I chose to say.

“If... If I couldn't see Loretta again for whatever reason, I think I'd be really sad.”



Loretta screamed.

“Wait, wait! Why do you always say important things like that when I’m not ready to record you!?”

“Yes?”

“Alright, say that again! Now!”

While hugging a strange crystal ball she took out of nowhere, Loretta requested while flapping her long ears. Could all elves move their ears freely? Or was it a special right as a Queen Elf?

The answer didn’t matter. Thanks to her reaction, I felt much more lighthearted. At the moment, she wasn’t scary at all. It was the usual Loretta.

“Then I’m off, Loretta. Thanks for everything.”

“Aaaaaah! You have to repeat what you said before you go, Shin-nim! I’ll give you 10 million gold! 10 million gold!”

Inside the mansion, the bath was the first place I visited.

“It’s huge.”

[Huge.]

[Huge.]

Although only one person needed to go in, it was as big as a swimming pool. Not to mention, it was full of all sorts of decorations. Across from its large window, I could see the mansion's garden, letting me enjoy its scenery while taking a bath.

When I got in the hot bath, my body that had grown cold from the Event Dungeon instantly loosened up. As I would get electrocuted if Peika went in the water, she held back for today, and only the materialized Ruyue, who was big enough for a person to ride on, had followed me into the bath.

[It's warm.]

“Yep, who says an ice elemental can't take a bath? It's not like your body is made of ice.”

[I feel like I'll melt.]

“Try not to.”

After washing my body, I picked one of the bedrooms in the mansion and slept soundly. As even the bed was enormous, I couldn't relax. Thankfully, I was able to relax with Ruyue and Peika with me.

Only then did Ruyue become stable. Perhaps because she had stayed materialized for so long, she instinctively refused to dematerialize herself. After taking ample rest and relieving the built-up tension, she dematerialized before I noticed.

In truth, I was troubled, since she had been draining my mana since we left the Event Dungeon. Although it wasn't an overwhelming amount, having a materialized elemental did drain more mana. I couldn't be freely leaking mana like that.

“We'll stay like this for a day, Ruyue. Starting from tomorrow, we can fight together.”

[Okay!]

Just like the dematerialized Peika, the 20 cm Ruyue was very cute. Because she was too cute, I kept patting her, and because Peika sulked, I had to pat her as well.

Now that I had two elementals, fighting the Skeleton Knight became even easier. After each of us destroyed a group of skeletons, we charged at the Skeleton Knight and crushed him before he could summon more skeletons. When Ruyue materialized, I could ride her into battle, and thus was no longer jealous of the Skeleton Knight's skeleton mount.

“Ruyue, let's go!”

[Aoooooooo!]

Ruyue answered with vigor and kicked off the ground. I felt sorry for Peika who only just learned to materialize, but when fighting the Skeleton Knight, it was better to infuse her into my spear with Spirit Aura than to materialize her. It seemed elementals liked to materialize, as Peika's dissatisfaction with the newcomer Ruyue was growing.

[Die, Skull Breakeeeeeer!]

“Ruyue, Ice Breath!”

[Kuaaaaa!]

A breath that froze everything came out of Ruyue's mouth. While the Skeleton Knight hurriedly blocked it with his sword, the skeleton mount, who was fully exposed to Ice Breath, couldn't move as the frost filled up its bones.

In that instant, I struck my spear down vertically. When I pushed my spear in from the frozen skeleton mount's head to its groin, then pulled out, the skeleton mount crumbled and disappeared into particles.

After falling on the ground, the Skeleton Knight held up his sword and shouted predictably.

[Kuaaaa, Skull Breaker!]

[Skeleton Knight uses 'Undead Roar!' Those with living bodies are slowed to 5 percent of their maximum speed!]

[Kuaaaang!]

The moment he activated Undead Roar, Ruyue roared and struck down his sword from his hand. Even if materialized, elementals were spiritual! Undead Roar did not affect them. Meanwhile, I used Divine Speed and Orc Lord's Warcry to cancel the Undead Roar. Holding my spear on Ruyue's back, I grinned as I aimed it at the Skeleton Knight's head.

"Let's see how many blows you'll withstand today."

[Kuk, 2 versus 1. It's unfair!]

"I don't want to hear that from you who had 200 skeletons!"

After eating the third Heroic Strike, the Skeleton Knight shattered. Just like always, it disappeared into particles.

"You got yourself another elemental. That one isn't the elemental you usually have with you, right? Your elemental wasn't visible before."

Lin said as he stared at Ruyue who I was riding on. After rubbing her head softly, I answered Lin.

“Peika can materialize too now, but... this child came from a hidden area in Fairy Garden. Her name is Ruyue.”

“Ah, that sealed... Amazing, really.”

[A draconian! I can smell Fairy Garden’s scent from him!]

“Eh? Did that child say something? I can only hear barks.”

“So you can’t hear her voice even if she’s materialized. Lin, you’re a Fairy Garden member?”

“Yeah, I’m the vice-guild master.”

“... Vice-guild master?”

“Yeah.”

What are you doing here!? At my inquisitive eyes, Lin answered half-heartedly.

“Well, whatever position with the word ‘vice’ is always the most leisurely. Vice-chairman, vice-class president, vice-representative, vice-president... While enjoying my no-working-happy-life, I tried

to take some water from the elemental spring to ferment some snake wine, when noonim caught me. So here I am.”

Wouldn't a draconian fermenting snake wine be considered killing one's own kind? Lin ignored my worry and asked.

“By the way, why do you keep repeating the 30th Floor Master raid? Haven't you finished collecting the Skeleton Knight Set by now?”

“It drops Bone Strengthening Elixirs. I've collected them all from the 5th floor on, so I can't skimp out of them now.”

At my words, Lin froze.

“... Did you just say strengthening elixir?”

“Yeah, strengthening elixirs.”

“... Haa. I see. With just a single Party Member Scarecrow, of course a strengthening elixir will appear. Hahaha, hahahaha.”

Lin laughed wholeheartedly and left his seat.

“Where are you going, Lin?”

“Mm? Ah, just wait a bit. Just going to shake noonim by the

throat a little.”

“Don’t go. Lin’s going to get beaten up instead.”

“... Thanks for stopping me.”

As I had personally experienced Loretta’s Second Bullet of Destruction, I advised Lin against his actions. Lin simply sat back down. Poor Lin. It seemed he had been hit before. A sense of shared pain flashed between our eyes. We, who were only connected by our bets, began to feel a sense of camaraderie.

Three weeks after that, I completed my Skeleton Knight grinding.

[You consumed a Bone Strengthening Elixir, strengthening your bones to the peak! Your strength and constitution both increase by 3. It seems consuming more of this item will have no further effect.]

[You equipped the Skeleton Knight Set. Your strength and constitution increase by 15. When the Skeleton Knight Set is equipped, you can use ‘Undead Roar’ once per day.]

Of course, I instantly extracted Undead Roar and stored it in the 6 o’clock position. Although I wondered if I would ever need to use



this skill, I realized I could use it in urgent situations. Then, I could use Orc Lord's Warcry to get out of the status effect, or use Dragon Skin to endure hits while leaving the battle to my two elementals. As such, I decided to store the skill into the pocket watch.

[Name: Kang Shin Race: Human Sex: Male

Class: Elementalist (Sub – Skill Collector) Title: Skeleton Knight Slayer Rank: Silver 6

Level: 31

HP – 12,540/12,540 MP – 7,150/7,150

Strength – 106(+41) Dexterity – 87(+22) Constitution – 90(+34)

Intelligence – 20(+12) Magic – 81(+12) Charm – 58(+12) Luck – 21(+12)

Normal Skills – High-rank Martial Arts (Lv 3), High-rank Spear Technique (Lv 5), Low-rank Crossbow Marksmanship (Lv 5), Mid-rank Heroic Strike (Lv 5), Mid-rank Provoke (Lv 4), Divine Speed (Lv 3), Return (Lv 2), Mid-rank Dash (Lv 2), Peruta Circuit (Lv 5), Deific Manifestation, Death Counter, Riding.

Class Skills – Mid-rank Spirit Mastery (Lv 4), Mid-rank Spirit Aura (Lv 2), Mid-rank Elemental Control (Lv 2), Mid-rank Elemental Contract (Lv 2), Mid-rank Elemental Tempest (Lv 1), Thunder Beast (Lv 2).

Subclass Skill – Endow Skill, Spirit of the Collector.]

[Equipment:

Power Earrings (Strength +2)

Flesh Golem's Second Finger (Strength +7, Constitution +7)

Skeleton Knight Set (Strength +15, Dexterity +15)

Arachne's Black Earthen Spear (Strength +5, Dexterity +10, Poison damage on all basic attacks, inflicts poison status effect.)]

[Collector's Pocket Watch:

1 o'clock: Orc Lord's Warcry

2 o'clock: Vengeful Spirit's Wail

3 o'clock: Dark Thunder Explosion

4 o'clock: Dragon Skin

5 o'clock: Diehard

6 o'clock: Undead Roar]

[3 Event Dungeon clears, 1 Event Raid clear, accumulated bonus stats: 6]

[Current skill points: 11]

[Six title-effects: (Orc Lord Slayer, Wraith Queen Slayer, Dark

Ratman Slayer, Giant Ghoul Slayer, Skeleton Knight Slayer, Lizard Knight Master, Hermes). Accumulated effects: All stats +12, 15% speed increase, increased affinity to all elements, affinity to wind element greatly increased, can summon Talaria once per day.]

[Contracted Elementals

1. Lightning elemental Peika
2. Ice elemental Ruyue]

While I was grinning as I looked at my stats, Lin severed the cigarette in his mouth as if his appetite had fallen.

“You tenacious dog, this is the first time in 900 years that I’ve seen someone consume strengthening elixirs to the limit.”

“You’re a lot older than I thought, Lin!”

“Uh, what? If you look at Loretta noonim... No, no. Forget I said that.”

“...”

When I stared at Lin fixedly, he dodged my gaze and spoke.

“Hey, don’t tell her I said something about her age... Noonim will kill me. Really.”

“Lin...”

“Hurry up and go to the 31st floor. Damn, there’s only a bit over two months left. If you want the cape, you better hurry!”

Lin shouted as if he had already given up. I smiled lightly and answered him.

“If someone was watching, he’d think you really wanted to give it to me. Regardless, I’m not going to the 31st floor right now. I have dinner soon, so I’ll come back tonight.”

“Mm? You aren’t going to the 31st floor now?”

“Ah, you see...”

Putting my spear back in my inventory, I continued with a trembling voice. Today, I would have to face someone more fearsome than the Skeleton Knight.

“Today’s the day my tests end. My friend will probably ask me to go out for fries and beer... Please wish me a safe return, Lin.”

“... Eh? You said friend just now, didn’t you?”

The only friend I made in college, Su Ye-Eun. I was scared of what would happen when I met her this time!

## Chapter 78. Under The Two Moons (1)

---

It didn't feel like a long time had passed since the midterms, but the finals had ended today. Resolved to score at least a B+, I crammed with my textbooks the day before the test. My base intelligence was 20, which became 32 after receiving 12 bonus stats from various effects! Although I suspected that it was still updating, my memorization and comprehension abilities were noticeably high. In other words, it wasn't hard to get the questions right on my tests.

"Huu, I feel like I'm not really a college student, just pretending to be one."

"A lot of college students feel that way."

When I murmured, watching the teaching assistant leave after collecting the tests, Su Ye-Eun replied as sprawled on her desk. Her face showed how happy she was to be finally free. Even though she must have less work than me, her grades weren't as good as mine. It was probably the result of me raising my intelligence to 20.

With today's test, the finals were over. It seemed there wouldn't be any more tests in this lecture room for the day, as groups of students stayed after the teaching assistant left and chatted.

"Shin."

"Yeah?"

Absently watching the trajectory of the camera following the students loitering in the front of the lecture room, I replied to Su Ye-Eun. She then asked.

“It’s winter break now. What are your plans?”

“I’ll be in the dungeon.”

“... Chii.”

“You?”

“In my room, playing games.”

“I think I’m better off than you.”

In any case, I was now done with my tests. I stretched and started packing my bags. Su Ye-Eun tried to say something, but hesitated. There was only one situation where she couldn’t get her words out. I turned around. There were three people, two girls and one guy. They were all pretty or handsome.

“Hey, you’re Kang Shin, right?”

“Yes.”

“Ah, we’re freshmen too, so you don’t have to be polite. Um, you came straight from high school, right?”

“Yeah. Su Ye-Eun, did you fail your entrance exam and have to take a gap year?”

“Do you want me to hit you?”

They asked with more relaxed expressions.

“There’s a [department MT](#). All the freshmen are coming.”

School outing at Korean colleges.

“All of them? The entire business department? There’s over 400 of us.”

“Yep. It’s to celebrate the end of finals for first semester. We’re all going from this Friday to Saturday.”

“That’s tomorrow! Pass.”

I shouldered my bag. Then, the guy stepped forward and stopped me.

“Neither of you guys really hang out with others. From what I hear, you guys didn’t come to the freshmen opening party nor to the MT in the beginning of the semester. No one even knows your phone numbers.”

“Because I didn’t tell anyone. I don’t really know why you want a loner like me to come to the MT...”

I really was curious. My social circle? I was content with the one I built with the people from the dungeon. As for college, I had my hands full with just Su Ye-Eun. Because I didn’t want to get involved with others, I didn’t talk to anyone and only politely responded to whoever talked to me first. As for group projects, I just skipped them. Who had time for that? I had to run the dungeon!

This time, one of the girls stepped forward.

“There are a lot of people who want to get close to you guys. You’re both famous.”

“Su Ye-Eun, she says you’re famous. Good for you.”

“She said you are too!”

“Anyways! You guys have to come to this MT! We’re leaving from school at three pm, so be there!”

The other girl looked at me and emphasized. Then, she even managed to get my phone number. She was undoubtedly going to call me if I didn’t come. Watching the three people leave like the wind after coming like the wind, I asked Su Ye-Eun.



“Don’t people usually leave outsiders alone? They don’t go this far, right?”

“Let’s go!”

Su Ye-Eun completely ignored what I said and kept going, her eyes sparkling.

“It sounds fun!”

“Have fun.”

“Let’s go together. Please? Let’s go!”

“Huu.”

I became immersed in thought. If I could get to the 35th floor by the end of today then... yeah, if I finished my three Floor Master battles tomorrow morning, then I could go to the MT without losing out on much. Plus, going to the MT didn’t sound all that bad. Since they went through the trouble of inviting me, I would feel bad if I didn’t go.

“Alright, sure, I’ll go.”

“Whoo! Just the two of us... I mean, the MT’s going to be fun!”

“Are you saying it’ll be fun because it won’t be just the two of us?”

“Auuuuuuu, no!”

I punished Su Ye-Eun by flicking her forehead. Just think about all the times you made me get fries with you!

“I’m not going with you for fries today.”

“Why!?”

“You wanted me to go to the MT. I have to go to the dungeon if I want to go to the MT.”

“Chii, you always say dungeon this dungeon that... what’s so fun about fighting scary monsters? Isn’t it more fun hanging out with me?”

I poked Su Ye-Eun’s puffed up cheeks and advised her.

“If you don’t fix your attitude, you’re going to be in danger one day.”

“... But.”

“If you want to fix it, tell me. I’ll help you.”

Su Ye-Eun had monsterphobia, but monsterphobia could be fixed. You just had to drive the fear out of your heart. It wasn't incurable, and if she didn't fix it, Su Ye-Eun will undoubtedly come to regret it. At my serious advice, Su Ye-Eun nodded her head meekly.

“Yeah... one day.”

“Alright, I'm off.”

I said my goodbye to Su Ye-Eun and turned my back to her. For some reason, however, I felt the gazes of other students on my back. As I left, I tried my best to ignore their gazes and their whispers.

“Are they really not going out?”

“They said they aren't! In any case, he said he's going to the MT.”

“Argh, I want to make him mine!”

“Yeah, keep dreaming.”

\*

The 31st floor was extremely quiet. Even when I yelled Commence Exploration, no monsters appeared. Thinking

something strange was going on, I walked onward. The pathway was the same as always.

The only difference was that there were sets of medieval armor here and there. They each held their own weapons like cleavers, claymores, and rapiers up into the air. Although they weren't moving at all, their appearances were very solemn and suspicious.

“They must be it, right?”

You guys weren't here until now. You thought I wouldn't notice if you stood still!? I charged at the nearest armor. When I got close, the armor creaked and began to move. Although the cleaver in its hand looked heavy and sharp, it didn't matter as long as I wasn't hit.

“Ruyue!”

[Auuuuuuu!]

With me riding her, Ruyue let out a lively howl and collided with the armor with her body. The part of the armor she contacted froze up and fell on the ground. Using the spear giving off golden lightning from Peika, I stabbed the frozen part of the armor. At that moment, a blinding light exploded.

[Critical Hit!]

The armor shattered. The ownerless cleaver struck the ground with a thud, and soon disappeared into particles. I was quite surprised by how well Peika and Ruyue worked together.

The armor could not have had bones, meaning my Skull Breaker effect didn't apply. Even so, the armor shattered in a single critical hit. No, were these guys just weak to begin with? For testing purposes, I put Ruyue on standby for the next armor and only used my spear clad with Spirit Aura. I had to stab four times for the armor to break.

“Oh, amazing, Ruyue.”

[Did I do well? Did I do well?]

“Yeah, you did very well.”

It seemed having Ruyue did more than just give me one more elemental, as she showed synergistic effects.

[Master doesn't praise me...]

“No. Of course, Peika is doing well too. We wouldn't be doing so well without you either.”

[Really?]

“Of course.”

[Ehehe, thanks Master!]

Although I didn't really feel it when I only had one elemental, but now that I had two, it felt like I was traveling with two children. Not that I minded with how cute they were.

To an Elementalist, communicating with his elementals was a very special and happy thing to do. Compared to when I was a normal dungeon explorer (though I suspected I was never normal to begin with), I was sometimes surprised by the new facts I knew and acted upon after becoming an Elementalist. Even so, I did not regret becoming an Elementalist and being able to meet my elementals.

After I finished praising my elementals and looked up, the armors that were lined up along the pathway like decorations were closing in on me with their weapons in hand. Those guys, would Tempest send them flying? I immediately gave it a go, but they didn't budge. As I thought, they were heavy.

I corrected my posture on Ruyue's back, leaning forward slightly and aiming my spear to the front. I lessened the amount of mana I put into Spirit Aura and transferred the focus to Ruyue. As a result, the amount of freezing energy coming from Ruyue's body increased. It was as if dry ice was placed all around Ruyue's feet.

I patted Ruyue's head and spoke.

“Ruyue, let’s run.”

[Okay!]

“Go!”

[Auuuuuuuu!]

Ruyue howled at the top of her voice and kicked off the ground. The moment she began to run, her incredibly fast speed made the scenery flash by like movie films. The armors, the so-called living armors, each swung their weapons at Ruyue and me and blocked our path. However, Ruyue wasn’t a normal wolf. Before any of the weapons could touch us, we became clad in an armor of ice, which blocked their weapons and froze the living armors.

I then shattered their frozen bodies with my spear of lightning.

[You obtained 400 gold!]

[You obtained 420 gold!]

[You obtained a Fragment of Living Armor!]

[You obtained 430 gold!]

[You obtained a Fragment of Living Armor!]

“Kuhat, this is fun! Ruyue, let’s go faster!”

[Auuuuuuu!]

She really did speed up! Without the Riding skill, I would have been knocked off her back a long time ago. Now that we were incredibly fast, the living armors from far into the 31st floor pathway woke up and swarmed us. As expected, these guys were also only strong in numbers.

Woosh! Whoosh!

“Haap!”

With more than five weapons attacking me from the front, I put more strength into my arms and struck them down. Ruyue’s freezing energy then froze them in place. The only sound the living armors made was the creaking of their armor, but now that they were frozen quiet, they really looked like ordinary armors.

Even while I ran forward on Ruyue’s back, I fished the frozen armors with my spear and sent them crashing against the wall.

“Stupid armor cosplayers!”



[You obtained 410 gold!]

[You obtained 440 gold!]

At this rate, I would be able to make it to the end of 31st floor within a few hours! With a violent smile on my face, I encouraged Ruyue.

“Ruyue, run! Faster!”

[Aauuuuuuu!]

“Come at me all at once, you leftover canned food!”

How were they similar? They were both empty on the inside!

Just like that, Ruyue and I swept through the 31st floor.

Until now, I had used my Dash skill to speed up running through the floors, during which I had to watch out for my stamina and the enemies' attacks. Now that I had Ruyue, who ran much faster than me and even blocked the incoming attacks, my dungeon clearing speed shortened drastically. Just like that, I could see Lin's rotten expression in just 3 hours.

It was a secret that I enjoyed his expression very much.

## Chapter 79. Under The Two Moons (2)

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From the 1st through 5th floors of the dungeon, each floor had different monsters. However, from the 6th floor and above, the monsters that appeared had a set pattern to them. The second floor was the same as the first floor, only there were more of them. The monsters on the third floor were slightly different, like a new type of monster being added or the same monsters using different skills. Regardless, once the first floor was cleared with ease, the second floor would also be easy.

The living armors on the 32nd floor weren't much different from the living armors on the 31st floor, other than the fact that their attacks were stronger and that there were more of them. However, because the pathway had become longer, it took me 5 hours to pass through the 32nd floor, even though I was already used to dealing with them.

It was already midnight at this point, but after my constitution broke through a certain point, I only needed 3 hours of sleep to wipe away the fatigue I had built up during the day. Plus, I could go for about 4 days without sleep and be perfectly fine. Although mother kept saying I wouldn't get taller if I didn't sleep, I would be troubled if I grew taller.

I had to be at school by 3, and it took me about an hour to get there. Because mother believed I would collapse from hunger if I skipped breakfast, I had to be in the kitchen at 9 in the morning. After that, I planned to wash up, get three hours of sleep, wake up, and do Floor Master battles before leaving for school around 2. The only problem was that I would have to clear the 33rd, 34th, and 35th floor and fight the Floor Master at least once in 9 hours.

“Ruyue, let’s hurry up a bit more.”

[Okay! I’m feeling great!]

Of course. This oppa was drinking a Mana Potion worth 10 million won per bottle for you.

After emptying a mid-high-grade Mana Potion, which had a 10 minute cooldown time and filled up 3,000 mana, I adjusted my posture on Ruyue’s back and pointed my spear forward, just like I had done when I broke through the 32nd floor. When Ruyue noticed that I was ready, she began to run. The living armors on the 33rd floor did not attempt to hide themselves and actively attacked me from all directions. Spinning the spear in my hand, I continuously smashed them.

“Haaaap!”

Although my aim was more to stop them from approaching me than to kill them, I struck down with my spear and destroyed them whenever I saw an opening. Just by being on Ruyue, I was naturally above the living armors. The destructive power from striking down with my spear clad with Spirit Aura was nothing to scoff at. The living armors did not die until their armors were completely shattered, meaning half-baked stabs were not effective. It was why I came to enjoy striking down from above.

However, after I broke the fifth armor and was about to keep going, something smacked me.

“Cough!”

[Aoooooooo!]

Clang Clang!

After realizing that I had been hit, Ruyue hurriedly created a wall of ice around us, blocking the follow up attacks and giving me a chance to regain my composure. After looking at my shoulder where I had been hit, I confirmed that it wasn't a serious injury and let out a sigh of relief. Then, I checked my HP. With just one hit, my HP had decreased by 10%.

What was it? I saw an iron mace for a second, but I definitely destroyed the living armor carrying an iron mace. I saw it disappear into particles, so I couldn't have been mistaken. In that case, the answer was obvious.

Whoosh! Whoosh!

“The iron mace moved by itself and attacked me!”

Seeing the iron mace fly above the ice wall and strike down at me, I fiercely struck it down with my spear. As expected, no one was holding the iron mace. My Spirit Aura exploded for an instant and shattered the iron mace.

Of course, I had known its identity. Flying weapon! Just like the living armors that moved by themselves, flying weapons also moved by themselves, as if they were possessed by ghosts. I should have expected it the moment I saw living armors, but I didn't think living armors would attack me with flying weapons. They had tricked me well.

[Does it hurt? Sorry, I didn't think it would move.]

[Master got hurt! You stupid!]

"It's fine, I didn't know either. Everyone makes mistakes. We just have to not make the same mistake again."

After comforting Ruyue, who was apologizing, and Peika, who growled at Ruyue, I fixed my posture. Although my shoulder still throbbed from the iron mace's heavy impact, my HP had only gone down by 10%. I wasn't a dungeon explorer for 5 years for looks. I had long since grown used to pain.

"From now, let's break the weapons as we go too."

[I'll be better this time!]

"Ruyue can keep doing the same thing."

I picked up my spear again. The moment Ruyue's ice wall crumbled under the continued attacks from the living armors, I lightly kicked Ruyue's thigh. With a howl, Ruyue started running

forward.

[Auuuuuuu!]

“Stop hiding and come fight me, you empty rice-cakes!”

[You used Provoke, drawing all nearby enemies' attentions!]

The living armors that were scattered here and there ran toward me with creaking sounds. Running around on Ruyue's back, I went to gather them up in one spot. While running, when living armors blocked Ruyue's path, she skillfully jumped over them, changing direction and gathering them all together.

Although I would end up facing a large number of living armors if I continued, I stopped after a certain point and ran circles with Ruyue in a wide area of the pathway. There, the living armors became confused and even accidentally attacked each other. I then went around to the outside, hitting away the living armors and flying weapons on my way, then aimed my spear at the gathered living armors and shouted.

“Elemental Tempest!”

[We were waiting!]

[Whoo, it's the spin spin!]

[Hey! I'm first!]

... For some reason, it seemed my name had begun to spread amongst the elementals. It felt strange. Regardless, thanks to the elementals overflowing motivation, I could activate Elemental Tempest with a shorter charge up time than normal. As a skill that used half of my mana, its effect was clear. A storm of elementals created by the combined effort of all types of elementals. I had never regretted using this skill.

As elemental storm swept over the living armors and shattered them, the combined creaking noise seemed to make an orchestral symphony.

[You obtained 500 gold.]

[You obtained 450 gold.]

[You obtained a Fragment of Flying Weapon.]

[You obtained a Fragment of Living Armor.]

...

I waved my hand and shooed away the flurry of messages. With so many monsters disappearing at once, the pathway was now wide open, making it pleasing to look at.

I opened another 10 million won Mana Potion. Although it was possible to hunt without using Mana Potions, once someone used one, it was impossible to continue without using them. After finding out the incoming money exceeded the expenditure, there was no reason to hold back.

Just like that, I became a man that used 10 million won every 10 minutes. However, every two or so living armors dropped around 500 gold, meaning just 20 of them would be enough to make up for it. Dungeon explorers rocked!

“Ku, that felt great. Ruyue, let’s go!”

[Auuuuuuuuu!]

The 33rd floor was thus cleared by the combined effort of me and other elementals in just 3 hours.

Starting from the 34th floor however, there were mummies mixed in with living armors and flying weapons. Mummies were monsters wrapped in bandages, who shot out their bandages to shackle their enemies. The living armors and flying weapons would then easily crush the shackled enemies. It was easy to understand why so many people would be troubled by their combined attack. I could understand the smile Lin had on his face, watching me advance to the 34th floor without buying anything at the 33rd Floor Shop.

Of course, the mummies were of no danger to me whatsoever.



[Human! A living human!]

[I want his body!]

[Take this!]

When I ran into three mummies while running through the 34th floor, they each shot three streams of bandages toward me. Although they looked like frail pieces of cloth, their defense was quite tough, so much so that I could not cut them with my spear in one swing. The moment the nine strands of cloth flew over me, I held up my spear in their path. The bandages wrapped around my spear, connecting the mummies to my weapon. Holding on to my spear tightly, I began to spin it around.

[Eh, I can't pull it away!]

[He's too strong!]

[My precious bandages!]

You shouldn't have sent them all out in the same attack! I strongly pulled on my spear wrapped by 9 strands of cloth, and the mummies closed in on me as if they couldn't elongate their bandages further. Watching this, I realized how strong I had gotten. I could win against three monsters my level in pure strength. I wasn't even a beastman!

“Peika!”

[Chain Lightning!]

When I poured mana into my spear and shouted Peika’s name, Peika swiftly used the elemental magic I was thinking of. The lightning energy that started to flow into my spear traveled through the cloth and cooked the three mummies to crisp.

[The heaven... has been enraged!]

[I shall go back to heaven...!]

[And I shall say it was beautiful...!]

“How do you guys know [that poem](#)!?”

Lines from the poem Back to Heaven by Cheon Sang-Byeong

No, maybe there was a similar poem in the world they came from. I murmured as I took off the burnt bandages from my spear. Then, I looked at the living armors and flying weapons that were happily flying toward me thinking I was captured, and grinned. What happened next was obvious.

[You became level 35. You obtained the qualification to challenge the Floor Master.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

“Crazy. You really are a crazy bastard. How do you do in a few hours what takes other people in parties two or three months to do?”

“Lin, I’ve been having similar thoughts recently. Though, at first, I thought other explorers were weird for being so slow and even dying while going through these easy floors.”

When I checked the time after reaching the 34th Floor Shop, it was 6 in the morning. It took me exactly 6 hours to climb two floors from the 32nd Floor Shop. However, I didn’t understand how others took two or three months to do the same thing. Even if I took out all the buffs from strengthening and compressing elixirs, took out the effects from various titles, took out elemental magic, and lowered my skill levels to what other explorers my level would have... I still didn’t think it would take me that long. Though, of course, having the Riding skill and Ruyue also helped boost my clearing time.

In any case, someone who was skilled enough to climb to the 30th floor on his own would undoubtedly have collected some titles and self-defining skills on his way. As such, my supposition was useless.

“Lin, what did you say you would do if I broke through the 35th floor in 1 year?”

“You haven’t broken through the 35th floor, nor have you defeated its Floor Master. You might lose to the Floor Master, have you thought of that?”

Lin chewed on his cigarette as he retorted with an unhappy expression. I grinned and lightly stretched my body after distributing my level up bonus stats. Because I rode Ruyue nonstop for six hours and wrestled with mummies, fatigue had built up in my body. I bought a 100 gold Fatigue Recovery Juice and proclaimed to Lin after I was done with it.

“I’ll see you in three hours.”

“I think you mean one week.”

“Beh. We’ll see how it goes.”

[Beh!]

[Beh! Beh!]

I stuck my tongue out at Lin and turned away. Peika and Ruyue also stuck their tongues out at Lin. How cute. Unfortunately, because Peika wasn’t in her material form, Lin wouldn’t be able to see her cute appearance.

“Hey, that dog... I mean, elemental. Did it just stick its tongue out at me?”

I didn't answer him. My head was already filled with thoughts of the 35th Floor Master, who would be waiting for me in the next floor.

“Hey, I asked if it just made fun of me! Hey, hey!”

I didn't hear Lin's voice. Nope, not at all. I raised my hand above my head to say goodbye, and headed past the Floor Shop. My heart beat at the thought of battle against the Floor Master I knew nothing about.

“Hey, hey! A mere elemental should not ignore a draconian!”

## Chapter 80. Under The Two Moons (3)

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Right now, there was only one question in my mind: What was the identity of the 35th Floor Master?

“Giant Living Armor?”

After saying it, I was 100 percent sure that wasn't it. Then what? Ghost Knight? No matter what, I couldn't be sure.

The best solution was to experience it for myself. Although I was more careful in the past, after realizing how strong I was lately, I began to act more boldly.

“Mm, self-control, self-control. Otherwise, I'll regret it later.”

Hubris was the greatest enemy to growth! I was only on the dungeon's 35th floor. There were many monsters, humans and other races that were stronger than me.

I had to get stronger. I wanted to become the world's strongest. If I was satisfied by my current strength and became arrogant, I could stop dreaming about growing stronger.

“Mm, good. Let's snap out of it, and get going.”

Although I couldn't be arrogant, being able to objectively understand my strength was also important. Between my stats

strengthened by elixirs and titles, and my two partner elementals, I was confident that I had enough strength to deal with the 35th Floor Master alone. After exhaling, I opened the door in front of me.

“Fight me!”

[Yes.]

A deep voice rang out. I looked around the room. It was neither a wilderness nor a graveyard. I was inside a slightly dark cavern. Unlike my expectations, there were no living armors or flying weapons scattered everywhere. Inside the cavern, there was only one opponent.

He was riding a black horse and his every breath expelled a blue gas. His black horse had a body that seemed big enough to swallow an ordinary horse whole, while he himself had a build large enough to suit his horse's size. A large cleaver leaned against his shoulder, while he carried a helmet in one hand.

His black steel armor had sharp spikes coming out of its joints, looking extremely intimidating. More importantly, he did not have a head. It was then that I realized that the helmet he was carrying was his head.

He was the headless undead knight, Dullahan.

[You are a warrior. That posture, aura. You are not lacking to be

my opponent.]

“Hooo...”

I held my Black Earthen Spear in hand and aimed it at him. As Ruyue was smaller than his horse, my spear was naturally angled up, but it wasn't to the point that it would be a disadvantage when fighting him. I was once again glad that I contracted Ruyue.

“What a coincidence. I'm happy that for the first time since I came into the dungeon, I met a proper opponent.”

[Kukuku, there won't be anyone that would be unsatisfied with a warrior like yourself.]

Dullahan also gripped his large cleaver. Just from his posture, I could tell he was different than anyone I had faced thus far. Although he seemed lacking in the arts, I could not underestimate the strength I sensed from his size and spirit.

In regard to Floor Masters, I once wondered, ‘If someone born with such physical ability honed his techniques, how strong would he be?’ I would finally have my answer today. Of course, I was confident that my physical ability and techniques had also grown a lot since then.

[Luckily, we're in a wide-open space. Let's enjoy this battle to our heart's content!]



“Right, let’s go!”

Dullahan and I both charged at each other. His black horse was faster! The large cleaver in Dullahan’s hand chopped down at my head like lightning. However, I ignored the cleaver and thrust my spear out at his head, which his hand was carefully holding. Dullahan quickly changed the trajectory of his cleaver and blocked my attack. Good, so he defended when his head was attacked.

[Don’t be conceited with just this much!]

“When did I act conceited!?”

I pulled my spear back quickly and attacked his wrist. With an incredible speed unfit for someone with such large build and weapon, Dullahan pulled back his cleaver and defended my attack once again. The resistance I felt from his defense was like an iron wall. I realized that ordinary attacks wouldn’t be able to injure him.

[Weak, weak! Show me your strength!]

“Huuu... Hap!”

He wasn’t someone I could fight while cracking jokes. I focused on the enemy in front of me, and the cleaver he was holding. If I received it directly, my strength unfortunately fell short.

I parried his attack before his strength reached its peak. When I

quicken my parrying timing, his stance was ruined. Before he even noticed, his stance was slowly broken and I delivered a blow. It was the technique I used against opponents that vastly surpassed me in raw strength.

“Ha!”

[Kuk, you...!?!]

When the time was just right, I sent three consecutive stabs forward, making Dullahan fall back. At that moment, Ruyue bit the neck of Dullahan’s black horse.

[Kuaaaang!]

[Hiiiing!]

Even though the black horse was a Floor Master’s mount, it was no match for the materialized Ruyue! When Ruyue let out her ice breath while the black horse’s neck was in her mouth, the black horse screamed and jumped. Dullahan, whose stance was already ruined to a certain extent, became flustered at his black horse’s wild movements. Even so, he struck down at Ruyue’s neck with his cleaver. In that instant, my eyes flashed.

“Heroic Strike!”

[Kuhuk!]

As my attack reached him in the perfect moment, Dullahan fell off his black horse. After realizing that its master had fallen off, the black horse's movements became even wilder. I shot my spear, clad with ample amount of Spirit Aura, at the black horse's half-frozen neck. I had extended my spear's reach with mana.

[Kuhiiiiing!]

Kuk, as I thought, it was impossible to kill a Floor Master's beloved mount with a single hit. Although half of the black horse's neck blew up and disappeared into black smoke, the black horse seemed fine, even with what seemed like a fatal injury.

While I made Ruyue fall back for a moment, Dullahan, who had fallen off his horse, also got back up and remounted. He seemed to be enraged as he swung his cleaver toward me. From the bottom to top, his large cleaver slashed up with a threatening appearance.

“Ruyue!”

[Auuuuuuu!]

Ruyue poured out freezing energy towards the cleaver as she threw herself to the side quickly. My cutie Ruyue was an all-purpose wolf that could go forward, backwards, and sideways! At Dullahan's normal speed, Ruyue would not be able to dodge his attack, but the ice breath she had breathed out had formed frost on his cleaver and slowed it down drastically.

[Elemental!]

“You noticed too late! Tempest!”

Making Ruyue charge towards him once more, I shot out a harsh spiral of mana with my spear. I didn't think a single Tempest could make him falter. As such, I shot out 5 consecutive Tempests. Rather than Dullahan, his black horse staggered and stepped back.

[Kuk, then how about this!?!]

“Huk!”

In an instant, something incredibly startling happened. Dullahan had thrown his cleaver! It wasn't just the cleaver that flew towards me. A black aura was imbued in the cleaver's double-edged blades. Just looking at it gave me chills.

Although I fell back on Ruyue, the cleaver even had a homing function. When Ruyue created an ice wall with her elemental magic, the cleaver easily shattered the wall and continued forward. Behind it, Dullahan rushed forward, following his cleaver! I gritted my teeth and glared at the cleaver. I had to smack it down. Both of them!

“Elemental Tempest!”

[It's the second time today!]

[Whee, fun!]

[It's true! You can ride amusement park rides if you follow Crown Prince!]

A five-colored whirlpool raged around the spear I held up. In the trajectory Elemental Tempest drew, I included both Dullahan and his cleaver, and shot it out.

The cleaver directly clashed with Elemental Tempest, but soon lost its black aura and bounced up. Dullahan coming from behind then faced the storm head on.

[Kuk!]

“Alright, it's time for counterattack!”

I hurriedly took out a Mana Potion and stuck it in my mouth. My goal was to deliver a blow before Dullahan recovered his cleaver. Ruyue kicked off the ground with vigor. However, before I could thrust my spear into his head...

[You dare!]

“Uk!”

In an instant, I ducked on Ruyue's back at the sense of unease I felt. As if to prove my decision was correct, Dullahan's cleaver flew past where my head was with a bone-chilling whoosh. I thought it had lost its energy, but Dullahan was controlling it the entire time!

Although I then picked myself up and thrust out my spear, Dullahan easily blocked the attack with his cleaver. However, his black horse was bitten my Ruyue again. While the master couldn't do his job, the elemental was racking up contribution.

[Hiiiiing!]

[You horse! Endure the pain!]

“Ku, I'll make it so that it doesn't have to!”

Extend spear!

[Critical Hit!]

In an instant, my spear severed the black horse's head. Would it continue running without its head like Dullahan? Although I tensed up and put more strength into my grip, what I was worried about thankfully did not happen. After losing its head, the black horse disappeared into black smoke without a sound and Dullahan fell to the ground.

“Peika!”

[Thunder Spear!]

When I shouted while thrusting my spear forward, Peika created a spear of lightning in mid-air and shot it in Dullahan’s head. Paralyzed by the shock from Peika’s lightning spear, Dullahan could not get up. Ruyue then freely stepped on his body.

[Auuuuuu!]

“Good job, Ruyue!”

I didn’t stay still either. I stabbed my spear at the bracelet on his wrist, which was protecting his head. After a moment, the bracelet exploded and his rotting bare arm revealed its appearance.

“Heroic Strike!”

[Critical Hit!]

[Kuaaaaak!]

My mana was now dangerously low! Not even half the cooldown time of the last potion I drank passed, but my mana had fallen below 30%. As a result, I was feeling slightly dizzy. However,

because the Heroic Strike went in successfully, the left arm protecting his head broke completely. At the same time, his head fell and rolled away from his body. With this, I thought I had ascertained my victory.

What followed immediately after instantly changed my mind.

[Kuaaaaaang!]

“Kuk!”

At his roar that stung my ears, I instantly fell back on Ruyue’s back. The place I was standing was then struck by his cleaver, creating a fissure in the ground. Without even thinking about recovering his head, Dullahan staggered as he got up.

I could not understand why. With his head away from his body, I thought it would have a negative effect on him, but the aura he was emitting seemed to be getting stronger.

Holding the large cleaver with one hand, he held it up high. Because I felt uneasy, I immediately ordered Ruyue.

“Cancel materialization!”

The moment Ruyue canceled her materialization, I shot a Heroic Strike at his right arm. Surprisingly, he was in a super-armored state! After taking my spear, which contained all of my mana, without batting an eye, Dullahan stuck his cleaver into ground.



Once again, I instinctively yelled out.

“Dragon Skin!”

Immediately afterwards, the ground tremored and countless shards of rocks stormed towards me!

## Chapter 81. Under The Two Moons (4)

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[Dullahan uses Outburst!]

D-D-D-D-D-Du!

“Kuk!”

Without kidding, I felt like I would die of pain. There was no way to dodge this. Shards of rocks completely surrounded me. Just because Dullahan struck his axe into the ground, the rock shards had begun to fly towards me like bombshells. If I hadn't used Dragon Skin on time, I would have died on the spot. Enduring the rock shards, I moved my body slowed from Dragon Skin, took out a Health Potion and gulped it down.

[Master, recover mana!]

[I can't use Ice Wall!]

“I can't recover my mana right now. I'll just have to endure it.”

Although I resolved myself to hold on until his skill ended, it lasted for quite some time. Gritting my teeth, I slowly moved my body. There was only one way to escape from this situation.

“I found it, damn it!”

Even as I was getting beaten with the rock shards, I found Dullahan’s head that was littered on the ground. His terrifying skill seemed to be a defense mechanism, to prevent someone from taking his head when it separated from his body. Although I gritted my teeth at the actions that resulted in such an atrocity, I was certain breaking his head would end this situation!

“Just. Die!”

Putting what little mana I had left into my spear, I thrust my spear forward. However, as if the head was made out of steel, the spear only made a small hole. Instead, my hand went numb. I checked my HP and MP. Thanks to Dragon Skin, I had about 50% of my HP, and I only had about 10% MP left. 10%... If that was the case, then...!

“Ruyue, I’m going to unsummon you for a bit. Peika, come into my gauntlet!”

[Master!]

“This might be better using my spear!”

Stabbing focused on one point. However, stabbing with just 10% of my mana, I would not be able to pierce Dullahan’s head. In that case, it could be better to expand that hole by punching it for 11 seconds. Since my spear didn’t work, I would be using my fists.

Plus, stabbing required me to concentrate, but all the rock shards flying at me disrupted my concentration.

Ruyue's body became faint, then disappeared. Peika also came out of my spear and infused herself into my gauntlet. Striking down at Dullahan's head, I shouted.

“Thunder Beast!”

[Kiaaaaak!]

Dullahan's screaming became louder, and the number of rock shards flying at me also increased. My HP began to fall at a scary rate. Clenching my fists tightly, I crazily struck down at its head.

“Uaaaaaaaaaah!”

[You used Orc Lord's Warcry! All party members are cleansed of negative status effects. All party members' attack power increases by 50 percent for the duration. All party members become super-armored, unfazed by enemy attacks.]

‘I'll give my all during this 11 seconds of attack!’

As I was in a super-armored state, being hit by the rock shards did not affect my movements in the slightest. Right now, I didn't need any fancy skills. I just focused the lightning energy in my fists

and struck down again and again. My HP fell below 20%.

[Master, we're almost out of time!]

“Just a bit more! Uaaaaaaah!”

I struck down again and again. Before I noticed, Thunder Beast was canceled and Peika was unsummoned as well. However, Orc Lord's Warcry and Dragon Skin were still in effect. Resolved to use Diehard, I continued bashing Dullahan's head.

Then, as if it were a joke, his head exploded.

[Kiaaaaaaaaaak!]

[A Grand Achievement! You defeated the Floor Master, Dullahan, alone! Amazing!]

[You became level 36. You obtained the qualification to advance to the 36th floor.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[You obtained the title, 'Dullahan Slayer.' All stats permanently increase by 1. This effect will apply even if the title is not equipped.]

[You became Silver Rank 5. Congratulations.]

[You defeated Dullahan alone. You obtained the special reward, 'Dullahan's Helm.']

[You obtained 100,000 gold.]

[Choose your reward.]

[1. Heavy Armor Mastery Magic Book]

As soon as Dullahan's death throes ended, the barrage of rock shards also ended. I turned around. His body was scattering into the air. In the end, I managed to win without using Diehard.

"Ah, what a disaster..."

Sprawled on the ground, I muttered. Until the middle, I had felt great, as if we were both exchanging pointers. Of course, as we were both using our skills, it was hard to say it was a pure fight of techniques. Even so, I was having fun. I had even thought I could defeat his axe technique and make him drop his weapon.

But just because I separated his head from his body, everything had changed. No matter how I thought about it, that skill was a cheat. I could see what would happen to normal parties. They'd think his head was his weakness and try their best to get it separated from the body. Then, they'd be showered by his rock

shards. I then became worried for Ren, but was slightly relieved when I remembered he could endure it with Dragon Skin.

“Really, none of the Floor Masters are normal.”

Although I wanted to stay sprawled on the ground to rest, I couldn't. I had to review my battle with him and think of a strategy that didn't use Warcry or Dragon Skin. Then, I needed to try it once to make sure it worked. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to go to the MT in peace!

\*

“So you ended up using Diehard?”

“Yes, damn it.”

It was one thirty in the afternoon. After eating breakfast and sleeping for three hours, I finally finished my third battle with Dullahan.

In the second battle, I crushed his hand holding the axe first. I then attacked his head, successfully preventing him from using Outburst. In the third battle, however, I accidentally hit his head with Heroic Strike. Enraged, Dullahan promptly used Outburst.

Because I didn't have Dragon Skin, I used Talaria to try to crush his head while avoiding the rock shards, but my HP fell below 3%, and Diehard activated.

The moment Diehard activated, I hugged Dullahan's head and used Dark Thunder Explosion, exploding his head and the rock shards before my vitality reached zero. If I didn't save Dark Thunder Explosion, I might have been able to end it before he used Diehard. It was my fault for failing to realize I could use Dark Thunder Explosion the moment I caught his head.

However, Lin seemed to be thinking differently.

"I'm more surprised you managed to defeat the Dullahan alone. Are you really human? Tell me honestly. You're some other race I don't know about, right?"

"Enough with the nonsense. By the way, Lin..."

"What?"

"You should stop playing dumb and start making that gauntlet. Within the 2 months I have left, I'll finish grinding the 35th floor and conquer the 40th floor too."

"..."

The bet between Lin and me said that he would take back my pocket watch and subclass if I couldn't break through the 35th floor in half a year. If I could, he would make me a gauntlet, and if I even broke through the 40th floor, he said he'd make me a weapon and defensive equipment set. If I managed to do it in 3



months, he would even add a dragon leather cape!

In other words, I had already won the bet. I just had to work towards the bonuses. Looking deathly pale, Lin took out a portable anvil.

“Eit, damn it. Because of my damn guild master, I had to meet this damn rookie and do damn blacksmithing damn work. Damn it.”

“See you tomorrow then, Lin.”

“Screw off!”

While Lin said his goodbye by sticking his middle finger out at me, I said mine with a smile. Then, I left the dungeon.

MTs were considered as highlights of any college student's college life. As I would finally be experiencing one after a semester, I was looking forward to it quite a bit. Though, I had a strong suspicion that I would be together with Su Ye-Eun even at the MT...!

“He's here!”

“Where's Su Ye-Eun?”

“Huh? She was just here a second ago.”

Ooh, it seemed this MT was supported by the professors. Right, since over 400 students were going to this MT, it wouldn't make sense if the professors weren't involved. There were probably [sunbaes](#) going too. Looking at the tour buses lined up against the school's hillside road, I blanked out. Before I noticed, Su Ye-Eun had appeared and was glued to my side.

Sunbae = senpai = senior at school/workplace/etc.

“Shin, you're late!”

“I came just on time. You were in stealth again, weren't you?”

“... I, I want to get closer, but I'm scared.”

I'm surprised you thought about going to the freshman opening party then. I suspected that she was the same in high school and wanted to try for a fresh start at college. Unfortunately, habits were hard to kill, and one's nature was even harder to change. In the end, she ended up as a loner without a single friend...

“I'm your friend, Su Ye-Eun.”

“What, so suddenly!? Like we aren't close...!”

I teased Su Ye-Eun as I waited. Suddenly, the surrounding people's murmuring became more severe. I asked Su Ye-Eun.

“What’s up with them?”

“There’s apparently a goddess in our department.”

“Really? I wonder what items a goddess would drop...?”

“...”

‘It’s probably not possible at my current level...’ My eyes had a distant look, and Su Ye-Eun was looking at me with an even more distant look. Kuhum. With a dry cough, I asked her again.

“So that goddess just appeared?”

“Yeah. She’s apparently an international student from France.”

“Really. There are so many international students at our college. Though, most of them are Chinese.”

More than 20% of our department was Chinese. When doing group projects, there was at least 1 Chinese international student in each group. Most of them weren’t enthusiastic. There were, of course, ones that were, but because of the language barrier, it was better to think of the international students in group projects as nonexistent. Though, since I didn’t participate in group projects, I didn’t have the qualifications to say anything about them.

Other than China, there were quite a few American, Japanese,

British, and French international students. For a school that bragged about cultural pride, it accepted way too many international students!

“We’re going! Get on the buses!”

As expected, I could see the sunbaes leading the MT. With Su Ye-Eun who grabbed onto me in order to not get lost, I got on a bus.

“Can I take the window seat?”

“Sure.”

After leaving Su Ye-Eun to take the window seat, I sat up straight, circulated Peruta Circuit, and summoned Peika and Ruyue.

[There are lots of people. Master, what are they doing? Are we hunting them?]

[Whoo hoo!]

“Please don’t, Peika. Ruyue, come here.”

I talked so only my elementals could hear me, then hugged them. Although they struggled for a little bit, they seemed to have found their comfortable spots as they sat still and looked around.

“We’re going to rest today.”

[It’s warm. I like it.]

[I like it too.]

Holding the calmed elementals in my embrace, I quietly closed my eyes and focused on Peruta Circuit. I had withdrawn my focus to my inner self to only concentrate on my mana traveling through the pathway engraved in my body. Since I usually circulated Peruta Circuit while I was running the dungeon, it wasn’t bad to devote my time to circulating Peruta Circuit like this. Soon, I fell into a trance observing and concentrating on my mana, to the point that I no longer heard the sounds around me.

“Auu, he looks like a painting even while he’s asleep.”

“Take a picture, hurry.”

“I want to hug him.”

“Mm? D-Don’t take a picture of Shin!”

When we arrived at the [pension](#) where the MT was held, it was about 5:30. When I opened my eyes realizing that the bus had stopped, Su Ye-Eun’s face was hovering in front of my own. Because of her well-defined facial features, I sometimes thought she was a foreigner. Close up, it was even more obvious. It was especially the case for her sharp nose bridge and big, manhwa

character-like eyes.

Pension is not meant to be mansion or a retirement plan, it's a large boarding house you can rent out.

“What are you doing?”

“I was trying to wake you up.”

“I wasn't even sleeping... Whatever, let's go.”

With my two elementals on my shoulders, I went outside with Su Ye-Eun, still circulating Peruta Circuit. The surrounding environment was clean, and there were no signs of civilization besides the pension in front of us. For a pension in the vicinity of Seoul, I was quite surprised by how nice it was.

First, I looked around. We were far from the city and there was a mountain nearby. After Two Moon, the environment to watch out for the most was the mountains, followed by areas near mountains. By that standard, the place we were in was quite dangerous.

“This place... a monster might appear here.”

“Not funny! Even if something happens, we can just alert Guardian, so don't worry.”

A female student that had approached me without me noticing

laughed and answered my monologue. I nodded my head with an evasive ‘mmm.’ Next to me, Su Ye-Eun pulled on my sleeve.

“Let’s go together, Shin.”

“Tsk.”

The female student clicked her tongue. I tilted my head, wondering why, and at the same time, caught sight of a female student stepping out of another bus. Blonde hair and blue eyes, she possessed a dazzling beauty that made those around her look a league below her. She was undoubtedly the international student called goddess or whatnot.

She also saw me, and winked. I winked back, thinking I should respond the same way. She seemed startled for a moment, but soon laughed and lightly waved her hand at me before going into the pension first. The male students that had gathered around her glared at me with scary expressions. It was truly laughable.

Although Su Ye-Eun kept pulling on my sleeve with an uneasy expression, I only shook my head, unable to understand why. The way she was shaking was making me uneasy as well. Just what was she uneasy about? I pulled Su Ye-Eun toward me.

“Let’s go. Even if a monster appears, I’ll protect you.”

“Kyaak!”

... Unable to understand why other girls were happy with what I said, the curtains were raised to my first [MT](#).



## Chapter 82. Under The Two Moons (5)

---

‘MT aren’t all that special!’ That was what I felt. I just listened to some bored professors talk and the 400 or so people were split into 20 groups. These groups were called classes, and it seemed these classes were formed at the freshman opening party.

“Did you know about this?”

“No.”

Damn, to think a community like this was formed from the start of school... Watching the people separate into their classes, we looked pitiful. Of course, we weren’t the only ones who didn’t go to the freshman opening party, so with the help of our sunbaes, we were able to join a class. Of the twenty classes, Su Ye-Eun and I were in the same class.

“... Hehe, we’re in the same class.”

“Ah, Kang Shin is in this class.”

“Shit.”

“... Su Ye-Eun followed him even here.”

We then grilled some meat and watched the talent show that others in our class prepared. I, of course, kept circulating Peruta

Circuit, and realized that I wasn't fit for the campus life. Twenty people fiddling around with just two grills irritated me, and watching the people's amateurish dances made me want to trip them with my feet.

After that, people went to the rooms assigned to their classes for drinks. People from other rooms sometimes barged in for drinking games, but I got tired of it all in exactly 17 minutes. I didn't understand why they needed to play a game to drink alcohol. If they wanted to chug it that badly, that should just drink it by the bottle!

As expected, college social life didn't really fit me. Although there must be more to it than just this, I had a strong feeling that whatever I was missing out on wasn't right for me anyways.

“Next time, I won't come.”

“Why!? Let's go to an MT with just our class. It'll be fun!”

A girl drinking nearby asserted as she approached me. Class MT? I looked around at the 18 people besides Su Ye-Eun and me. There were two Chinese international students. Both were male, and were talking to girls with rather obvious intentions. Su Ye-Eun then screamed and hid behind my back, making them glare at me.

Other than them, there was a male and female student who looked awkward around each other as if they just broke up, group of guys that were planning on going to other rooms to pick up girls, and girls that strangely liked to give me more drinks.

Wondering if they knew my identity and were trying to threaten me, I became nervous. Going to another MT with these people? I would rather die.

After losing a few rounds of the drink games and drinking the special penalty drink, Su Ye-Eun stuck herself on my back with a frown. Of course, I had to take more guys' glares because of it. Even though Su Ye-Eun covered herself with her hoody, it seemed people had found out how pretty she was.

“Hey, Shin.”

“Uh, yeah... Ina.”

Barely remembering the name of the girl that called out to me, we exchanged drinks. After Su Ye-Eun became too intoxicated to continue, the drinking game stopped, and everyone sat in a large circle and began talking about interesting things that had happened over the semester, like general gossip or stories with famous Guardian or Freedom Wing members.

Young and good-looking Guardian and Freedom Wing members became famous through appearances on TV networks, regardless of their abilities. It was the governments' attempt to make the citizens feel familiar toward the Awakened. I suspected that the government would eventually have TV shows where Awakened hunted monsters.

“Are you really not going out with Ye-Eun?”

The girl pointed at Su Ye-Eun stuck to my back. Like a sloth, she had her arms on my back and was dozing off. She really didn't know shame.

“I'm not. We're just friends.”

“But Ye-Eun likes you.”

“She just doesn't have the courage to make friends other than me.”

“It's definitely not just that ...”

The girl sighed and looked at Su Ye-Eun with a look of pity. The girl, who I only knew as Ina, then asked.

“S-So... you don't have a girlfriend?”

“Oooh!”

“She's doing it!”

“Go, go!”

The girls around me got louder. Peika and Ruyue, who each sat on my shoulder, made growling noises. Thinking that this drinking party would continue for a while, I unsummoned them.

Then, I answered her.

“I don’t.”

“Ooooooh!”

“He says he doesn’t!”

While others were talking excitedly, I suddenly smelled something strange. Something foul. I put my nose to the drink in my hand. It was a perfectly normal whiskey. Then where was the smell coming from? It smelled a bit like iron. I was definitely familiar with it. This was...

The smell of blood.

I slowly stood up. The others looked at me, but I didn’t care. Su Ye-Eun, who also got up, rubbed her sleepy eyes.

“Hm, what’s wrong, Shin? Am I home?”

“Why would I be in your home? If you’re awake, go wash your face.”

As Su Ye-Eun didn’t want to separate from me, I carried her on my back as I walked toward the windows and opened one. The outside was silent and still. No, the silence was immediately broken by the smell of chemicals as a small firework went up into

the sky. It seemed people from other classes were setting fireworks. Regardless, I knew that a monster had not appeared outside. Was I mistaken?

Then, the door opened. When I turned around, there was someone completely unexpected standing there. It was the French international student and a few of the male students that followed her around.

“Huk, it’s Chloe.”

“It’s Chloe Blanc.”

The guys that had been planning to go to other rooms stopped and quietly sat back down. The girl called Chloe Blanc then walked into the room with a smile.

“The guys in my room already passed out. Do you guys mind if I join you?”

Her Korean was extremely fluent. Of course, no one declined and Chloe Blanc naturally joined us.

At the same time, Su Ye-Eun began to shake and whispered in my ear.

“I, I don’t like her.”

“How rude. We haven’t even met before. Besides, you shouldn’t say that while you’re hogging such a hot guy.”

She sure had good hearing. Su Ye-Eun was startled and stuck even closer to me. The guys started to complain and Blanc shrugged her shoulder.

“I’m Chloe Blanc. What are your names?”

The people in the room took turns introducing themselves. After waiting for them to finish, Blanc gave me a glance. I answered her shortly.

“Kang Shin.”

“Shin! What a cool name. It matches your handsome face.”

“I can say the same about you.”

“Empty words, but I’ll gladly take them.”

Drinks went back and forth again. Just her presence seemed to be sweetening up the atmosphere. The guys that were eyeing Su Ye-Eun changed their attentions to Chloe Blanc, making it easier for me. However, because her gaze was fixed on me, I felt a bit uncomfortable. The other girls also found it irritating.

“She has tons of other guys. Why...?”

“Argh, annoying.”

It seemed word had gone around that she was in this room as a few more guys came in. Because there was a limit to how many people we could fit, we had to turn them down. Although they brought up wanting to change members, no one accepted. I, on the other hand, wanted to get some fresh air. When I got up, Chloe Blanc suddenly stopped me.

“Where are you going, Shin? Take me with you. I want to talk to you more.”

I sat back down. The gazes from the other students became more hostile. What did this French international student want from me? As I wondered, Su Ye-Eun’s shaking got worse. After a few more drinks were exchanged, I finally asked her boldly.

“Chloe Blanc, what’s your objective?”

She hesitated slightly, then looked around the room. Following her eyes, I also looked around the room. Most of the students were lying on the floor, or had hazy eyes. Almost as if they were zombies. Almost as if someone made them like that.

She honestly replied.

“I want to kill you and take your vital energy, Shin.”



She closed her eyes then opened them again. Vertical pupils that appeared were showing that she wasn't human.

Shit! I knew she had been planning something, but I didn't think she was a monster! Su Ye-Eun pulled on me stronger. Realizing what was in front of her was a monster, Su Ye-Eun had activated her super vibration mode.

“You can't run. Do you think I was just drinking here for fun? I already captured everyone in this room.”

With that, Chloe Blanc gracefully raised her hand. One of the girls looking hazy naturally brought a cup to her hand. She did it respectfully, with both her hands.

“It's too late for you too, Shin.”

She smiled charmingly. I heard the sound of clothes ripping as a pair of black wings shot out from her back. They looked like enlarged bat wings. She then opened her mouth as she let out golden light from her eyes.

“I'll introduce myself again. My name isn't Chloe Blanc, though I did come from the country you humans call France. I'm 'Blood Succubus,' the owner of the dungeon that appeared in France.

[An Event Raid has broken out! B-rank 20-man Raid, 'Blood Succubus.' Because you were at the location of the raid boss,

you will be forced to participate.]

[You hold the priority for the Event Raid. Unless you want to reveal its existence, other dungeon explorers will not be notified until 1 hour later!]

I gritted my teeth. For some reason, she looked incredibly charming. Succubus. A monster said to appear in men's dreams and devour their vital energy. The succubus in front of me had the terrifying ability to charm both men and women in reality.

Although she was only a B-rank 20-man raid boss, her special ability was undoubtedly frightening. I was trapped in her status effect. Before it was too late, I had to use Orc Lord's Warcry...!

"Kuk, I already used it...!"

I had already used Orc Lord's Warcry in my battle against Dullahan this morning. Not only that, but I had also used Dark Thunder Explosion, Dragon Skin, and Diehard! If I couldn't solve my status effect, I could really die!

I had to escape. That was the only way I could live! I tried to activate Return, but it didn't work. My instincts were refusing to let me leave. I did not want to separate from her. I did not want to be far away from her. Even though I knew I would die! With the same reasoning, I could not let the other explorers know. Return, Elemental Summoning, Deific Manifestation, and even going into the dungeon, her charm was strong enough to prevent me from

doing anything.

Gritting my teeth, I asked while I could still talk freely.

“France’s Gate should have disappeared!”

“That’s right, but I wonder why? When I woke up, I was in Paris. Unfortunately, a scary oldie named Michelle kept chasing me, so I had to run. I managed to reach Charles De Gaulle Airport and sneaked onto a plane. It turned out that it was going to Seoul. Then, when I was wandering aimlessly, I met Chloe. She gave me her knowledge, body, and even her existence. She was such a good kid.”

Increased chance of an Event Raid happening where Event Dungeons disappeared. I finally understood what it meant.

Currently, the world was full of bosses that had escaped their dungeons when Event Dungeons disappeared! It was just that their characteristics determined whether Event Raids broke out immediately or they hid themselves among humans, like the Blood Succubus I was looking at.

“I didn’t know you were a monster!”

“What do you mean, monster, how rude. Look at me, aren’t I beautiful? Which part of me looks like a monster?”

“The part... kuk... where you killed humans. You already killed

today too, right?”

“Oh? But humans kill other humans too. You shouldn’t call me a monster because of it. What a mannerless man. But you aren’t wrong. You see, I already took care of five rooms. After all, today will be my last day at this college. I wanted to consume as much vital energy as possible tonight. In truth, you’re tonight’s main dish.”

She stood up. Throwing the glass cup and shattering it, she slowly walked towards me. Her long, slit pupils shined with evil and charm.

“The pure and boundless mana you have, it’s too tempting. Did you know, I’m the one who planned this MT.”

When my eyes met hers, I could not move at all. Without Orc Lord’s Warcry, I was powerless against status effects. I should have realized it sooner, so that I could have planned for it! I had relied too much on the Floor Master skills, and this was the result. I was too ashamed of myself.

It was then that I realized Su Ye-Eun’s trembling had stopped. She was now murmuring to herself.

“I’m s-scared... but...”

“You stay still. I’ll eat you too, after I’m done with Shin.”

“I-If I don’t do it... I’ll die... Shin will... die...”

To protect Su Ye-Eun, I frantically tried to think of a solution. How could I escape this charm? If I could snap out of it for just a moment, I could rip that woman to shreds!

However, white noise kept jamming my head. An irresistible attraction to her enveloped me. Any methods that I could use to separate from her, I myself was rejecting it.

Right, she was my everything. Separating from her would have little meaning. If she wanted, I could even give my life, so why should I resist?

I smiled. Blood Succubus also smiled. Her eyes opened wide as they let out a radiant golden light. I felt like forgetting myself and sinking into them.

At that moment, Su Ye-Eun stepped in front of me and raised her trembling hands. She even took off her hoody, which I had never seen her without. Her long, beautiful, night-black hair fluttered like water.

Then, the Blood Succubus’s left eye was ripped out.

## Chapter 83. Under The Two Moons (6)

---

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaak!”

“Peika! Ruyue!”

The moment the succubus screamed crazily, I regained my consciousness and yelled out Peika and Ruyue’s names. My two elementals immediately made their appearance.

“Kiaaaaaaaaaaaaaak!”

[Master!]

[Are you okay? Are you okay?]

“Before I become weird again, pull out her other eye!”

Taking my eyes off the succubus, I yelled at the top of my lungs. Although I also needed to request help from the other dungeon explorers, as I didn’t know if they would come immediately and couldn’t think straight from the fear of being completely subordinate to one being, I could only yell out my simple command. I could have also called Peruta using Deific Manifestation, but I had forgotten about my reliable master from the extreme fear I felt.

Peika and Ruyue seemed to have noticed how desperate I was as

they flew toward the succubus without even replying. I couldn't see it. I didn't see it.

“Kyaaaaak! You bitch, I'll kill you! Bloody Raven Wing! Flame Cutter!”

[Frozen Arrow!]

[Thunder Spear!]

Things exploded and ravaged through the room. Although shards flew at me, as they were only remnant pieces of the attacks, they could not damage me by much. The students being controlled by the succubus could have been injured, but I wasn't in a position to worry about them.

I then started to think about what had just happened. When I was about to give up my life to the succubus, when I stood there without being able to do anything, I could still vividly recall the sense of helplessness.

But in that situation where my vital energy was about to be taken away, the succubus' eye was ripped out. However, all the other students should have been under succubus' control, and because they were ordinary people, they could not have done anything, even if they weren't under her control.

Before the succubus' eye was ripped out, Su Ye-Eun had taken off her hood. It meant she had withstood the succubus' charm longer

than me. Not to mention, Su Ye-Eun wasn't next to me right now. In that case, there was only one answer.

The one who ripped out succubus' eye was Su Ye-Eun.

How!? She should have had monsterphobia, and even if she didn't, how did she rip out the eye of a raid boss!? Of course, the answer was simple. Su Ye-Eun didn't have monsterphobia and instead had a strong ability that allowed her to rip out the eye of a B-rank raid boss. Her stealth ability didn't just hide her appearance, it hid her ability as well.

“Everyone rise! Kill these damned things!”

At the succubus' shrill voice, I snapped out of my thoughts and raised my head. The students that were watching blankly on the ground began to rise.

Shit. In this place where lightning, fire, and ice flew around, their lives would be in danger just by getting up! No matter how desperate the situation was, I couldn't just stand and watch students throw themselves into a pit of fire. But what could I do? After a bit of thought, I remembered I had a way to stop them.

“Kiaaaaaaaak!”

[You used Vengeful Spirit's Wail. All enemies within its area become confused and feared!]



---

“Ueeeeek.”

“I can’t see in front of me.”

“I have to complete Master’s orders.”

“Hiik, don’t come here! Stop!”

Although they were being controlled by the succubus, they still had the physical abilities of ordinary students. After being affected by Vengeful Spirit’s Wail, they fought each other or rolled on the ground. One by one, I hurriedly picked them up and threw them out into the hallway. I could smell blood rising from the hallway. She really killed so many people!

Damn it, had no one contacted Guardian yet? Now that I thought about it, there wasn’t anyone to contact them! This damned succubus must have charmed people the moment she sneaked into the college. Since this MT was started by her, it was likely the pension’s security cameras weren’t working either.

Past the open door, a thundering sound rang out. A chill ran down my back. This woman was calling her minions! To use the dungeon explorer communication channel that I had been forgetting about, I put my hand on my mouth. At that moment...

“Kyaaaak! My eyes, my eyes!”

[Master, that strange woman pulled out both her eyes! Her charming power disappeared!]

[That woman is scary. Scary.]

Peika and Ruyue flew back toward me. Her charming power disappeared? Recalling the sense of helplessness I felt, I turned around carefully. There, I saw Su Ye-Eun fully revealing her pretty face and fluttering black hair, and attacking the Blood Succubus. She disappeared and reappeared here and there, while her hands were dyed red from the Blood Succubus' blood.

Su Ye-Eun's eyes glowed red, unlike normal. Using stealth, she hid herself from the succubus, then attacked with her fingernails when the succubus made an opening. Her fingernails clearly had mana imbued into them, giving them a red aura. Although slightly barbaric, she was flashy and strong.

As for the Blood Succubus, even as blood dripped down from her eye sockets, she managed to detect Su Ye-Eun's location and threw magic at her. As expected of a raid boss monster! The walls were already destroyed and the windows were all shattered. If things got worse, the entire building could collapse.

After taking Succubus' attacks, Su Ye-Eun was bleeding here and there. Although her attack power was strong, her defense was low. At this rate, they would both kill each other. Since I knew I no longer had to worry about Blood Succubus' charm, I couldn't just stand here and watch Su Ye-Eun get beaten.

I took out Black Earthen Spear from my inventory. Although I considered using Deific Manifestation for a moment, I threw the thought out soon. What was I afraid of? I had to get revenge with my own hands. I shouldn't back away, especially after knowing I was strong enough!

“Peika.”

[Got it!]

Without having to say much, Peika went into my spear. Possibly because she felt the fluctuation of energy, the Blood Succubus, who was still dripping blood from her two eye sockets, looked at me. It was truly a sight of horror.

“Thanks, Ye-Eun. You can rest now.”

“Ut!”

Su Ye-Eun was startled by my voice, then obediently fell back. I was worried about her mental state from her sudden change, but it seemed she was okay. At the same time Su Ye-Eun fell back, I charged at the Blood Succubus.

“Youuuuuu!”

The Blood Succubus hesitated about who to attack between me

and Su Ye-Eun, but in the end, she chose the one who was charging at her, me. Dozens of fireballs appeared in the air and flew toward me. Ruyue snorted.

[Ice Wall!]

Although they were both B-rank raid bosses, there was a clear difference between the 20-man raid Blood Succubus and the 500-man raid Giant Iron Boar. Given ample amount of mana, Ruyue's ice wall stood strong even after receiving all of the Blood Succubus' attacks.

In truth, the succubus without her charm ability was like a tiger without its claws. There was nothing to be afraid of.

I used Divine Speed. In the blink of an eye, I was in front of the succubus. Swinging my spear, I first cut off one side of the succubus' wings. It was because her wings were exuding an aura of charm. Although she wasn't strong enough to charm me without her eyes, there was no need to leave behind a potential source of danger.

“Kuaaaak! W-Wait!”

The succubus finally seemed to have noticed my strength. A dumb monster would have attacked without understanding the difference in strength and died, but the Blood Succubus, who was having a life or death battle with Su Ye-Eun just a moment ago, shrunk back like the mouse in front of a cat.

“Wait, wait, let me live. Please. I, I’ll give you my loyalty. I’m just a poor succubus. That woman is the one who bullied me. If you save me from her, I can even give you my body...”

“Don’t need it.”

I interrupted her. I didn’t want to waste any more time by listening to her. Who knew if she’d recover during that time and pull a fast one on me?

“I just wanted to live! I’ll be loyal to you, so please, don’t kill me. I won’t kill that woman either! I was only a little excited because I appeared in a world like this. I, I’ll apologize! My body will be quite useful!”

“Your body, huh?”

“Y-Yes! Once my eyes recover, I’ll serve you with a beauty that no man can resist. I will do anything you want, so please let me live! I will be your slave!”

A succubus that can take the form of a beauty. What men wouldn’t be tempted by being able to have such a woman? Her offer was indeed tempting and she chose her words well.

However, she chose the wrong opponent.

“Then who’s going to pay for all those that died?”

“Pay? What do you...”

“Bye.”

“Wai—“

Without a shred of hesitation, I severed the succubus’ head. The Black Earthen Spear, which I had poured ample amount of mana into while waiting, had easily sliced through her neck. I caught the succubus’ head, which had flown into the air. Now that she was dead, she really wasn’t much. I became frustrated, realizing I could have died from being charmed by her so easily. I would have to reflect on this time and time again.

At the same time the succubus lost her life, the students that were rolling the floor stopped moving. They were no longer in her control and had fainted.

In the next moment, a fanfare rang out.

[Event Raid Complete! With just one member, you succeeded in the Event Raid! This great achievement increases the rewards by an enormous amount! Your vastly superior rank to the raid boss decreases the rewards by an enormous amount!]

[You completed an Event Raid and obtained 1 stat point as reward.]

[You obtained Blood Succubus' Earrings.]

Leaving the messages behind for later, I turned around and looked at Su Ye-Eun. She was looking at me blankly, then realizing that I was staring at her, she snapped out of her daze. She held up her hands and saw the blood on them. Her lips and hands began to shake, which then spread to the rest of her body. It was the symptom that made me suspect she had monsterphobia.

“N-No, Shin.”

“Hm?”

“I-It’s not me. I-It’s not, s-so don’t be afraid.”

“Afraid...?”

After hearing that, I began to understand the real reason she trembled in front of monsters.

She wasn’t afraid of monsters. She was afraid of herself, who became exceedingly cruel when fighting monsters, and she was afraid of others who became scared after watching her.

I retorted.

“What do you mean afraid? You were really cool. Plus, I’m the one who sent her head flying. Why would I be afraid of you for something like that?”

I was a bit sorry since my words might not have been the most comforting.

However, they seemed to have worked as Su Ye-Eun’s shaking became weaker. Her eyes, which still glowed red, grew bigger.

“C-Cool? I wasn’t scary?”

“Yeah, extremely cool, like a female warrior. Ah, I’d still recommend you use a weapon though... but you were a lot of cooler than when you shook in front of a monster.”

“... R-Really? I was cool?”

“Yeah.”

I nodded my head without hesitation. Since I was saying what I honestly felt, there was no reason to hold back. Su Ye-Eun had saved me when I was about to die. If I were a girl, I would have fallen for her valiant appearance.

Su Ye-Eun started crying. Without showing any signs of doing so, she sobbed abruptly.



“Hic, hic...”

“Uh, hey, what, why, did I do something wrong?”

“Hic, uwaaaaaah!”

She ran to my embrace and cried her heart out. It seemed I didn't do anything wrong. In fact, it was probably the opposite.

I would be glad if she could let off some of the burden in her heart, but I was still flustered, as I could do nothing to stop her from crying. Other students in the building would soon realize what had happened. If we wanted to avoid being found out, we would have to escape soon...

There was no other choice. I first called out to Peika and gave her a special order and ample mana. After Peika got out of the room, I put my hand on Su Ye-Eun's shoulder and comforted her.

“There, there, Su Ye-Eun. Don't cry. I don't know what happened in the past, but let's first wash ourselves off and get rid of the damn evidence, alright?”

“Hic, you called me intimately before as just Ye-Eun...”

British, Lukan, or Korean, why did they care so much about how their names were called!?

“Alright, Ye-Eun. No more crying. Let’s clean up and go rest, okay? I’ll hear you out.”

“Hic, hic, Ueeeeeeeh!”

It seemed it would take a while before she would stop crying. I patted Su Ye-Eun... Ye-Eun, who was crying in my embrace and looked up at the night sky through the broken windows. The two moons were unusually bright tonight.

Almost as if to signify that the world had changed.

Almost as if to say there was still time before the sun would rise.

## Chapter 84. S-Ranker Yeon Hwawoo (1)

---

I had asked Peika to destroy all electronics within and around the pension. As a lightning elemental, she was skilled in detecting electricity. It was something that only she could do.

Smartphones, cameras, security cameras, monitors, etc. Not a single electronic device was spared. Although it required a lot of mana, it was easily solved with two bottles of Mana Potions. Unfortunately, even Ye-Eun and my phones were destroyed.

Although the Blood Succubus must have put some effort into removing the evidence, I wanted to be sure. Peika was perfect for the job. As an elemental, cameras could not see her, and as a lightning elemental, she had talent in easily breaking electronic gadgets.

What I was most worried about were the memories of the students that were controlled by the Blood Succubus. Depending on the circumstances, I might need to completely modify my plans. Thankfully, I managed to rouse and question a student, who could not remember anything. In fact, the student could only barely remember coming to the MT.

I was glad I didn't need to silence all the witnesses. Ah, the student I woke up? I made him chug alcohol until he passed... I mean, slept. He would probably not remember the questions I asked.

Next, we created our alibis. First, while the students were

sleeping from the aftereffects of being under the succubus' control, I made Ruyue clean us up. As an ice elemental, she cleaned us as following.

[Eit, freeze!]

Like that, she froze everything (blood, dust, etc) on our bodies except our clothes. We then wiped off and threw everything in the toilet. With that, we didn't need to take a shower or wash our clothes. After experiencing the power of elementals, Su Ye-Eun touched her body with a blank expression, then became excited.

“Amazing! I want one too!”

[I hate you! Scary!]

After retorting to Ye-Eun, Ruyue flew toward me and hid behind my head. She couldn't hear or see you anyways, Ruyue.

“Drink this. We have to get rid of your injuries too.”

As I patted Ruyue, I gave Ye-Eun a potion. It was the potion I chose when the Floor Masters didn't drop elixirs or the equipment parts I wanted.

Since I couldn't give the potions from the Floor Shop to others, I had to give her one of these potions, of which I only had a little amount.

“What’s this?”

“A potion. You’ll find out if you drink it.”

As expected, Ye-Eun made a fuss soon after. I ignored her and healed my own injuries. With this, we were perfectly clean.

What? It would be weird if our surroundings were a mess and we were perfectly clean? Of course, it would. But there was a reason for us to be this clean. We had to pretend we were never here tonight. When people began to investigate, the people at the scene of crime would be questioned first. Although we might just be burying our heads in the sand, we had to try to avoid it first.

“People usually sleep in other rooms anyways. We should pretend we did that too.”

“I-In another room... with just us two!? Uuu, I’m nervous.”

“No, we’re obviously going to be with others...”

“...”

Hey, why were you making that clearly disappointed face? Even as I was lost for words at her expression, I cleaned the room that became a mess from the fire, ice, and lightning.

Although no one would find out I did it, it was best to get rid of as much evidence as possible. I also picked up the students I threw out into the hallway and threw them back in. With that, everything was more or less done.

“Alright, now we just have to go to some other room, pretend to have fainted, and act surprised when we wake up in the morning.”

“Shin, you’re evil...”

“It’s for our peaceful lives, so cooperate.”

My plan was as followed. Tomorrow, people would freak out when they saw that people had died and that Chloe Blanc had disappeared. New Moon Agency would deploy Guardian to investigate without being able to obtain much information. At least, I hoped they wouldn’t. I had used two elementals to get rid of the evidence. If they found dirt on me, they would reassess my ability as an Elementalist.

Anyways, I would then appear a few days later as Yeon Hwawoo. I would tell the New Moon Agency that I coincidentally met a succubus that claimed to be the owner of a dungeon beyond the Gate, and promptly took care of her. Although the plan seemed full of holes, the succubus’ disguise ability was real, so I could just play around it.

The whole world had to find out about this incident. They needed to understand that dungeon bosses had spread out across Earth, so they could prepare themselves for it.

The things I had to be wary about were how to explain me running into the succubus who had left the pension, or the people from Guardian that would get on my back trying to get the corpse of the succubus from me. Of course, I would insist that I met the succubus by chance and I had no reason to give them the succubus' corpse. Beginning from the succubus' eyes Ye-Eun took out, I would not let even a single hair of the succubus fall into the hands of the government. Anyone that dared to covet my belongings would get a beating from me. I would have no mercy.

For the record, I exchanged the eyes Ye-Eun took out for taking her out for fries five times. Although I thought I was taking advantage of her, she was the one who offered. Just like that, the succubus' golden eyes ended up in my hands. I decided to give something to Ye-Eun later to make up for it. In fact, I already knew what to give her.

It was time to carry out my plan. Ye-Eun and I found a room to go into. As the succubus' charm had reached this place, everyone was lying on the ground fainted. We found a place to sit and leaned against each other. Once I sat down, the tension built up in my body released, making me sigh naturally.

“Huu... I want to lie down and sleep.”

“Give up.”

“Yeah, I did.”

Who would find a nice place to lie down and sleep in this mess? I decided to be happy that I could at least be clean as I leaned against Ye-Eun. Just like that, we stayed silent for a little while. Ye-Eun was the first one to break the silence.

“... You won’t ask?”

“You can talk about it when you’re ready.”

“ ... ”

She went silent again, then as if to say everything she had been holding back, she opened her mouth again.

“You see... I fought against monsters in front of my family.”

“Family, huh?”

“Yeah. For some reason, whenever I see monsters, I get the urge to fight them. That time... before I realized it, I was pulling out the monster’s heart with my bare hands.”

“ ... ”

I imagined a pretty girl laughing as she took out a monster’s heart. It was indeed not the most pleasant image. In any case, she had an innate gift. An innate gift for fighting. Even while she was usually perfectly normal, whenever she saw monsters, she would



want to shred them to pieces.

Monsterphobia? Absurd. She was a monster slaughterer.

“I can’t forget the way they were looking at me then... it was as if they weren’t looking at a human being, much less their own family member. Even though I saved them, even though I was their daughter and sister... In the end, I couldn’t stand it and left the house to live by myself.”

Apparently, ever since that day, she would freeze when she saw monsters because she remembered the way her family looked at her. I never imagined something like that could have happened to Ye-Eun.

“But the day I met Shin, watching you fight... I thought, ‘wow, so you can be this cool and beautiful while fighting’...”

“What? I didn’t hear that towards the end.”

Plus, I didn’t think I was that cool. If I remembered right, I just pierced a pigeon with an iron pipe.

“A-Anyways! I thought good things would happen if I stayed with you.”

“You should have said it earlier and asked for help.”

“H-How could I...? It’s hard for me to say it, even now.”

“Sorry, I was too thoughtless.”

Ye-Eun stopped talking for a moment. I waited silently. Soon, she continued.

“But today, because you... looked like you would get killed...”

“I would have, if not for you.”

“I wanted to continue pretending like I had monsterphobia. I didn’t want to show you my ugly side.”

“Like I said, you were cool.”

With a light smile, Su Ye-Eun continued.

“... When the thought of you dying crossed my mind, I forgot my parents’ faces for an instant. Before I noticed, with my hands... I was digging out that woman’s eye.”

“So you knew where to attack instinctively. I can’t believe I didn’t realize you had such talent before. As a martial artist, I’m ashamed.”

“And because Shin kept saying I was cool... I forgot my parents

faces forever.”

“Forever!?”

‘You’re sure you won’t remember them for life!?’ At my question, Su Ye-Eun nodded her head vigorously.

“From now, I think I’ll be fine if I’m with you. Yup, I’m sure I will.”

“... Good to be of help.”

I was happy that such an ability user of such caliber could finally use her full potential. I was happier that that person was my friend, and I was extremely happy that she had stepped up to protect me. Though, because the amount of contact her body was making with mine kept increasing, I was feeling a bit uncomfortable.

“So take good care of me... forever.”

“Like I said, forever is exaggerating too much. Regardless, take good care of me too. As ability user comrades.”

“Hehe... I really like you.”

“Yeah, well, me too.”

Then, Ye-Eun suddenly shot up and held my shoulders. Her eyes, which had turned black after the fight ended, were expanded to a scary size. The shoulders she grabbed onto hurt. Then, she said some nonsense that I would never forget about for the rest of my life.

“Then is today our day 1!?”

“No, that’s a bit... I don’t have any plans to date for a while. I have to run the dungeon.”

“...”

Ye-Eun paled and froze in place. In truth, I froze too. What just happened? Although I rejected her on reflex, did she just confess to me!? What kind of a confession was that? That was the second confession out of the blue since the one from my third year of high school! Was it a prank? But I should have broken all the cameras already! I fell into a state of panic.

Ye-Eun fell on the ground.

“I thought you liked me...”

“That’s called being overconfident.”

“But you bought me fries...”

“I think your standard of judgement has long passed a normal person’s level.”

Although I liked her, I had never thought of her as a member of the opposite sex. To think that was what she thought this whole time, it seemed Ye-Eun has also been single her whole life. Ren, be happy. I found another comrade!

“D-D-D-Do you maybe have someone you like?”

“No.”

“Good... Then I’ll wait! I can wait!”

“No, that’s a bit pressuring...”

Ye-Eun ignored what I said and openly looked relieved. When I was watching her, the back of my neck began to itch. I couldn’t believe that a girl this pretty liked me.

Of course, compared to the days when I was gorilla-bodied, I looked much better now. But back then, I had once given up, thinking, ‘in this world, it might be impossible to date without taking appearance into consideration.’ Just because someone said she liked me, I couldn’t just say, ‘Oh, really? That’s what I thought.’

I felt like I was dreaming, like I was floating among the clouds. As such, although I was a bit sorry, I couldn’t accept her confession.

Thus, I gave her an offer.

“I can’t really say it’s in its stead, but Ye-Eun.”

“Y-You want to start out as just friends? But we’re already friends...”

“No, it’s not something dumb like that.”

“Something dumb!?”

“There’s something I want to offer to an Awakened full of talent and desire to beat monsters.”

“...?”

Looking at Ye-Eun who was frozen without understanding what I was saying, I spoke with a smile.

“Do you want to try becoming a First Dungeon explorer?”

## Chapter 85. S-Ranker Yeon Hwawoo (2)

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The next day, the entire pension flipped upside down. People found out that over 100 people had been killed. There were rooms where everyone inside was dead, leaving behind only dried up corpses, while there were people simply sleeping in rooms the Blood Succubus had not gotten to. Because of it, the incident became even more of a headache.

Ruling out the possibility that this was done by a person, the professors and staff immediately reported the incident to Guardian. Then, they saw the traces of fighting in the room Ye-Eun and I were in, safely concluding that the incident was caused by a monster. However, they thought it was strange that no victims arose from that room.

The Guardians that arrived later on were convinced that a human had interfered in the incident, but as they did not have the authority to investigate, they had to leave it to the police through the New Moon Agency. The police, of course, disagreed with them slightly. They were sure that a monster had been behind the attack, and said that if a person was involved, that person must have fought the monster to prevent more people from dying. In the end, they could not find a lead on the truth of the incident. Because of the sheer number of students staying at the pension, they couldn't investigate each and every one of them.

Had Guardian and the police agency had a more definite relationship of cooperation, things could have been different, but their relationship was rocky, to say the least. It was because the Guardians appeared and saved citizens from monsters in times of danger, which took away from the positive views the citizens had

of the normal police. To be more specific, the police agency did not enjoy having to cooperate with the Guardian whenever monster-related incidents occurred, and Guardian likewise did not trust the police agency. As this had been going on since the beginning of Two Moon, the two agencies were only friendly on the outside, while they were no different than enemies outside of the public eye.

“We do have to be thankful though, since they just let it slide by.”

“Yeah.”

Thanks to their rocky relationship, we were able to return to our homes safely. At the same time, I made Ye-Eun into a First Dungeon explorer and taught her the things I knew. Even as she seemed confused, she listened to me. I thought she was more than capable of climbing the First Dungeon with her excellent stealth ability and attack power, but she seemed happier to be doing the same work as me.

“35th floor! I’ll be there quick!”

“No, that’s impossible. Like I said, you need to grind.”

“I can just level-up quickly to make up for it!”

She was saying the same thing father said. Upon thinking about it, I thought that wasn’t a bad idea. After all, with her superb ability, leveling up might be better. Giving up grinding and



speeding through the dungeon was indeed something she could do. Though, of course, things would get harder the higher she climbed.

I advised her to do solo raids if she could. She was overwhelmingly stronger than me when I was on the 1st floor. Her ability would only get stronger as she climbed as well. As such, she would have no trouble doing solo raids. I told her to at least consume one elixir of each type as they immediately raised stats. Ye-Eun then nodded her head in understanding.

I told her the strategy for going through the lower floors and ways for her to get used to the dungeon as quickly as possible. However, she didn't listen to me and was just staring fixedly at my face.

“Hehe, this is nice. I like it.”

“What's this?”

“Mm? You know, this! Hihi.”

Ye-Eun skirted around the details and laughed happily. I thought I saw the wagging of a puppy tail, but it was just my imagination. First, I flicked her forehead a few times for not listening to me properly, then explained again. However, it was of no use. She was laughing even as I hit her. For someone that was just rejected, I wondered why she was so happy. Since I felt like she would confess again if I asked, I didn't do so. My entire body felt itchy.

“Ah, by the way.”

“Mm?”

“For the time being, leave the dungeon explorer communication channel off.”

I emphasized again.

“Who knows if you’ll slip something.”

“Okay.”

Ye-Eun nodded her head as if she was just given a top-secret mission. I was satisfied with that. Then, I told the other explorers about what happened last night.

[Yeon Hwawoo, are you unhurt!?]

[Are you okay, Hwawoo-nim?]

[Yeah, I’m fine. I wouldn’t be talking in here otherwise. I’m going to go to the New Moon Agency to disclose what happened. Mastiford-ssi, please back up my claims later. It’d be better if you can come to Korea.]

[Hm? Like I said, call me Hwa... ah, mm, yeah. I’ll try. To think

all those Event Dungeon bosses could be hiding in various countries, how terrifying. You must have had it rough, Yeon Hwawoo.]

[Thanks for comforting me, Mastiford-ssi.]

Then, Hwaya sent me a private message.

[Then can you come support me here too, Yeon Hwawoo? We haven't been able to advance recently. You came even come as Thunder Knight.]

[I'll think about it. If you can stop China from getting in the way, I'd be happy to go. I always did want to see Windermere.]

[Don't worry, China isn't in any position to hold you accountable, and Britain sees Thunder Knight rather favorably. We call you a true knight. I'm sure everyone will receive you happily.]

[Got it, but don't call me Thunder Knight.]

Just like that, we made a secret agreement of cooperation. Walker then joined the communication channel.

[Yeon Hwawoo... you seem rather close to Mastiford.]

[Walker, I think that's just you being a loner.]

[Walker-ssi, Hwawoo-nim is different! He's Takemikazuchi-nim's incarnation!]

[No, that's not right, Minami-ssi.]

I did like the name since it sounded strong, but I wasn't Takemikazuchi, but Hermes. It's important so don't get it confused! Though I couldn't tell her that.

A few days later, I visited the New Moon Agency as Yeon Hwawoo, wearing Otus' Secret and the Wraith Queen Set. When I explained the circumstance to the manager, he looked at me like I was an idiot.

“You're talking about France's Gate? I think you're going too far with your joke.”

“Is that so?”

I opened the coffin I was carrying on my back, revealing the succubus' corpse. I had temporarily stitched back the wing I cut off and her charming golden eyes.

“I looked into it, and it turns out this girl is an international student from XXX college's business department. You know, a student of the school that had that recent massacre.”

“M-Mm. Indeed, this monster goes above the normal standards. Not to mention, the corpse contains a considerable amount of mana... Yeon Hwawoo-ssi should have been A-rank. Did you kill this monster alone?”

“My ability must have gotten stronger.”

I claimed.

“She said she came from beyond France’s Gate. It’s probably something to make sure of. I knew something was strange the moment those damned Gates disappeared. It might be easy to just laugh it off, but you should know what the smart decision should be. After all, who knows if something like this will happen again?”

The manager became silent for a while, then spoke.

“This is outside of my jurisdiction. I might have to bother you for a little while longer, is that fine?”

“I hope you can pay me the proper hourly wages.”

I retorted with a smile. That evening, S-ranker Yeon Hwawoo held a press conference that appeared on all 3 broadcast TV news channels. I thought New Moon Agency would take care of the press conference if I just reported the problem, but the so-called chief of New Moon Agency passed the baton onto me. His reasoning was that strength equaled trust. It was possible, as Korea did not have an SS-ranker.

Although I was a bit nervous about going on TV, the mask I was wearing helped me relax. I first introduced myself, then explained about the Event Raid. Of course, I didn't use the exact terminology.

The moment I explained my ability was martial arts based on lightning attribute mana, I received questions asking if I was Thunder Knight. These journalists sure did their jobs well. I spoke evasively, saying I wished I could be Thunder Knight, then continued to how and when I met the succubus. When I revealed that succubus had told me she had come from beyond France's Gate, a barrage of questions flew in my direction.

"How can do we trust those words?"

"If you don't want to believe them, you don't have to. I'm here to warn the world about a potential danger, not to argue whether I'm right or wrong."

"Do you have proof?"

"There's no way to bring this succubus back to life, but I'm sure there are other monsters that can take the form of humans. I believe the world should be more alert."

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

"You, follow me."

Even after one of the carefully selected reporters got dragged out, the press conference continued smoothly. Just like the New Moon Agency's chief said, it was hard for them to ignore the words of one of Korea's four S-rankers.

In truth, my goal wasn't to get them to take my words seriously, but to just let the world be aware of the possibility and stay alert. However, as the Korean media made a huge deal out of the press conference, the story began to spread to other countries like wildfire. The New Moon Agency also asked for my opinions a few more times, and even formed a new department with Guardian. Although they asked for my cooperation, I declined respectfully. Of course, when they asked if I could give them the succubus' corpse, I declined a bit more violently.

“Mom, oppa is on TV! Come see!”

“You know you can't tell your friends, right?”

“Of course, oppa.”

Yua was purely happy that I appeared on TV and stared at it fixedly. Mother, on the other hand, tilted her head, seeing me disguised as Yeon Hwawoo.

“Why does your jawline become so slender with that mask? It's doesn't look good.”

“I like it though. It's thin and nice.”

“It’s too thin! You’re perfect the way you are now, son.”

“I like the current oppa too.”

For now, I decided to record Yua’s line.

Father felt indignation that his son went on broadcast TV before him (as a well-known martial artist, he had been on cable TV before). His eyes burned as he vowed to find an Event Raid boss. Father, we both went on broadcast TV before... though we were both wearing armor.

Hwaya kept her promise. After my press conference, she went on Britain’s TV, supporting me and insisting that countermeasures had to be put in place. She had found the time to do so even while she was busy with ‘Graveyard Over the Lake.’ Although she apologized for being unable to come to Korea, I told her it was okay. Then, I decided that I would visit Britain soon.

The British government officially requested aid from other countries’ SS and S-rankers. The situation had become too dire for them to worry about their pride. Though, no country had sent an SS-ranker outside of their own country...

In truth, Japan and America were both in trouble as well. For Japan, they seemed to care about their pride as they insisted they would take care of it on their own. As they only had a B+-rank dungeon, it seemed it would not take long for them to take care of it.



The real problem was with America's S-rank Field Dungeon, Wyvern's Nest. It was a terrifying place where the S-rank monster, wyvern, appeared. Not to mention, as wyverns had wings, they were constantly expanding their territory. People were worried that at this rate, other canyons near Page would become dungeons. Although America's SS-ranker seemed to be holding on, they would soon have to borrow the strength of other countries like Britain. Wyverns. I wanted to try hunting them.

In any case, after making plans to visit Britain, my business on Earth had been taken care of. News, newspapers, and even magazines tried to focus their stories around Korea's fourth S-ranker, Yeon Hwawoo, but he was a rogue and they could not find any information about him. Whenever I worked as Yeon Hwawoo, I used Return, thus shrouding my identity in secrets.

While the mass media was focused on Yeon Hwawoo's identity, I focused on the dungeon.

After all, in the dungeon, there was something I had to quickly take care of.

## Chapter 86. S-Ranker Yeon Hwawoo (3)

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[Blood Succubus' Earring (Unique)]

Durability – 85/85

Equipment Limits – Level 35+, One Who Defeated the Blood Succubus

Options – Magic +10, Intelligence +5, Charm +15. When equipped, you will emit a scent that easily attracts members of the opposite sex.]

Although it was still great, the Blood Succubus' Earring I was excited about didn't have the ability I hoped it would have. As such, I asked Lin about what to do.

“What? Mental protection?”

“Yes.”

As he looked at me with disappointment, I explained what had happened. When he heard I was charmed and almost killed by the Blood Succubus, his expression was quite the sight.

“You, did you really get charmed by something so weak? Are you

an idiot?”

“That’s why I’m trying to find a countermeasure. After all, I can’t stay like this.”

“Kuhum... You, do you know what the best method is to protect your mind?”

I tilted my head. With a sigh, Lin explained.

“Your magic is the most important factor. The higher your magic stat is, the easier it gets to overcome mental attacks. Then, it’s intelligence, followed by charm.”

“I understand why intelligence would be important... but why charm?”

“Charm doesn’t just make you look pretty. It affects how others react to your presence. It doesn’t need to be explained in detail, just know that having high charm makes it easier to defend against mental status effects.”

“Then I guess I’ll have to wear these earrings... But Lin, you can’t raise charm with bonus stat points, only through equipment or title effects. Though, they do go up by themselves occasionally.”

Lin struck down at his anvil with his hammer and retorted.

“So raise your intelligence.”

“Is... Is that the only way?”

“Of course, there are other ways. Skill. You can learn a skill that protects you from status effects.”

“How!?”

“I remember it being extremely tricky to learn on your own...”

With that, Lin made a circle with his thumb and finger. He wanted money. When I took out 5,000 gold, he smirked. When I took out 30,000 gold, he shook his head. In the end, he accepted 50,000 gold, which I took out with trembling hands. Then, he continued.

“Try succeeding on the 40th floor solo raid.”

“You scammer!”

“I just gave you an answer though—?”

Lin hummed and continued hammering away. Although I gritted my teeth and watched him, there was nothing I could do. After all, he had not lied. At least, he had pointed out what I should do. Though, since I couldn't do anything about it now, I decided to set aside the countermeasure for mental attacks. When I was about to

head out to find Dullahan, Lin stopped me.

“In truth, there’s a third method.”

“What?”

“You can wear an equipment that has that effect. One that doesn’t raise stats to defend against mental attacks, but one that can directly defend your mind.”

“That’s what I hoped the succubus’ earrings were, but they weren’t... Do you perhaps sell an item like that at the Floor Shop?”

“What are you talking about? You already have the material.”

I tilted my head, and Lin gave me an evil smirk.

“You, have you ever heard of the phrase, poison as medicine?”

“You mean...”

“The succubus’ corpse, give it to me. With a 50,000 gold deposit, I’ll work on it.”

“Lin, so that was what the 50,000 gold was for... Thank you!”

I was deeply touched and did not hesitate to show him my

gratitude. Lin let out a few dry coughs and nodded his head. Then, he gave a very unforgettable follow-up.

“It’s separate from the information fee I just received, so don’t misunderstand.”

“Agh...”

It was the first time since I met Lin that he got me so well.

I reflected on my experience with the succubus greatly. Until now, I had been too easy going. Never expecting to meet monsters in my daily life was one thing, but what was more important was that I panicked when I couldn’t use Orc Lord’s Warcry when I wanted to. There were plenty of things I could have done before things had gotten too serious. Was I relying on my Skill Collector abilities too much? Why didn’t I make use of all that I could!?

The biggest problem was that I did not use Deific Manifestation then. What was I saving it for? Wasn’t it exactly for dangerous situations like that? Stupid, truly stupid. Why didn’t I fully use my abilities!?

Was it because the enemies I faced until now were too easy? Was it because everything could be solved using Floor Masters’ skills? I was truly stupid. Giving my all no matter who I faced was expected of a martial artist! Father had always emphasized it! Not to mention, even though I knew the abilities I was relying on had a once per day restriction, I panicked and became frightened when I couldn’t use them. My judgement had wavered as well. If father

found out, I would undoubtedly have to go through another thrashing phase.

Luckily, I did not lose my life this time. In fact, it became a good opportunity for Ye-Eun to overcome her trauma and become a First Dungeon explorer. Things had really turned out well. However, that didn't mean that such a loss was acceptable. Even I could not accept it.

This failure was a good opportunity for me to overcome my weakness and grow. If I had realized it later, I might have regretted it a lot more.

Everyone made mistakes. What was important was to not make the same mistake again. I decided to take this critical failure to heart, and to recall it whenever I found myself becoming lax. I vowed to change myself.

That included changing my foolish old self that was too reliant on Orc Lord's Warcry and did not pay attention to mental defense, and did not think I would run into monsters in real life. It also included becoming able to use all my abilities, not just the Floor Master skills, to their limit.

Thankfully, I had an appropriate opponent. It was the strong enemy I had to face three times a day, Dullahan.

He was strong and had techniques. He was a good opponent to use to push myself to my limit. The first time I fought Dullahan, I was too reliant on Floor Master skills. Although I won as a result, I

didn't think it was a complete win. Of course, it was true that Dullahan's skill was cheaty, but what about when I first fought the Orc Lord? When I fought against the Orc Lord's cheaty Warcry, did I have the pocket watch? Did I even have mana? No, the answer was no.

I grasped each and every movement the Orc Lord made and his next movements, calculated the best trajectory to parry his attacks, and patiently dealt blows to his body. Although it took a long time to conquer him, I did it using pure physical ability. Although my vitality had reached zero a few times in the process, I was a lot more of a warrior back then than I was now.

I didn't mean I would go back to how I was. After all, I was both a warrior and a dungeon explorer. I meant that I would not rely on any one ability and give my all in battles. Vowing to myself, I opened the door to the 35th Floor Master room.

“Fight me, Dullahan!”

[You already defeated a being identical to me.]

Without stopping his horse from pawing the ground violently, Dullahan spoke as he aimed his axe toward me. I nodded my head and patted Ruyue.

As the bond between an Elementalist and his elementals became thicker, he could communicate his intentions without having to say it in words. He could even directly transmit his thoughts and make the elementals move accordingly. Because of the shocking



way Ruyue and I met, the bond I shared with Ruyue was as thick, or even thicker than the bond I shared with Peika. If I wanted to fight on Ruyue's back, communication between us was key. Although I didn't think it was necessary until now, I had changed my mind. Not doing it when I could was simply stupid.

[I feel good, like I can do anything.]

[If you let Master get hurt again, I'm going to smack you.]

[I won't. I like Shin more.]

[I like him more!]

Elementals, I am glad that you like me, but now is not the time to fight. You're ruining my cool moment! I once again softly patted Ruyue. I closed my eyes for a moment, then opened them.

"Be prepared, Dullahan."

[I'm not so thoughtless that I would let my guard down around a strong opponent like you. Come!]

No, but you don't even have a head... Stop! No more jokes!

I passed my thoughts on to Ruyue in my head. The path she should take and how fast she should do so were all outlined in my head. It also included how I would attack Dullahan.

[Auuuuuuu!]

Ruyue kicked off the ground without any warning and charged at Dullahan. I lowered my body on top of her and held my spear up. Dullahan also held up his axe. If I was strict and serious, his axe martial art technique was about mid-rank level 5. Since that was the average skill level of explorers on the 35th floor, he was truly strong.

However, my spear technique was high-rank level 5. Why was I evaluating him like I was a normal explorer? Because of it, my spear was intimidated and my attacks were less sharp. Overestimating the opponent was just as bad as underestimating your own strength. Having a higher martial arts rank and level did not just mean having stronger attacks. It meant I could overpower the enemy in technique. Without being hit by the enemy's attack, I would deliver a blow to him. That would be the start of my advantage.

“Hap!”

[Fas... kuk!]

Last time, Dullahan had fully defended against my spear attack. This time, however, his awkward defense made his balance waver, and allowed me to deliver consecutive stabs.

[Kuk!?!]

“I’m not stopping.”

I did not pay attention to his head. With my consecutive stabbing, I aimed at the areas of the axe where his strength wasn’t concentrated, then changed my focus to his arm. At the same time, I ordered Ruyue to attack his black horse. Although Ruyue fought well by herself, we had to work together to increase the synergy between us.

[You dare!?!]

“You’re going to throw it, right?”

As Dullahan pulled his axe back, I focused on stabbing Dullahan’s wrist. At the same time, Peika used Thunder Arrow to attack the axe that was about to leave his hand. Every time her lightning arrows collided with his axe, the lightning energy traveled through the axe and caused Dullahan to twitch. While he couldn’t recover his balance, I dealt more attacks.

[My beloved mount, blaze the enemy!]

“Ruyue!”

[Auuuuuuuuu!]

As I thought, the black horse also had a special function! At

Dullahan's shout, the black horse inhaled a deep breath. At the same time, Ruyue swiftly poured Ice Breath on its face. After breathing in the freezing energy, the black horse coughed and fainted. Its throat must have frozen, preventing it from breathing. Dullahan, you were finished the moment you rode a living horse as an undead!

Although Dullahan quickly got up and tightly gripped his axe, I delivered a great shock to his wrist using my spear. Ruyue raised her front legs. Shining with snow-white light, Ruyue tried to stomp on Dullahan's legs and freeze him.

[An elemental!]

"I've already heard that line before!"

After raising my spear up on Ruyue's back, I activated Heroic Strike and sent my spear, which had turned into a white lightning, into its body.

[Critical Hit!]

[Kuaaaak!]

Dullahan had a material body, and obviously had bones. As such, he received 50 percent additional critical damage. Skull Breaker, what a cheaty title!

I continued to stab Dullahan's body. Then, when the head he was dearly protecting with one arm glowed, I immediately made Ruyue fall back.

I had fallen to that once before. Sudden Rise. It was a strange skill that made Dullahan's body stand up no matter what position he was in. At the same time, he let out a dark fog that paralyzed anyone it touched. If I hadn't fallen back, the tide of battle might have been overturned.

[Kuaaaaaa!]

As expected, the moment I made Ruyue fall back, Dullahan shot up while emitting a black fog. In his hand was his ghostly axe. Although he charged at me and swung his axe down, Ruyue dodged to the side while I attacked his legs, which still had some of Ruyue's frost. Dullahan's body tilted and the axe hit the ground magnificently. Then, Dullahan gritted his teeth while he brought up his axe again.

[You aren't bad, Human.]

"If you're surprised by that much, wait until you see what's coming up."

Lightly retorting to Dullahan, my eyes flashed with coldness. The spear I held up once again turned into white lightning and threatened him.

Active battle skills were truly difficult to obtain. The active battle skills I obtained while climbing to the 35th floor were only Heroic Strike, Elemental Tempest, and Thunder Beast. Not to mention, Thunder Beast was more of a support skill than an attack skill, as it greatly raised my attack power. Other than these three, Dark Thunder Explosion, which was stored in my pocket watch, could count as one.

As such, I had to make the best use of my attacks skill to deal critical damage at the right time. Elemental Tempest was a large area of effect skill that used half of my MP, and Heroic Strike was a single-target skill that used a large amount of HP and MP. Thunder Beast was comparatively better, but it had a 110 second limit, and I could not use my spear with it. It was then that I wondered. Was there a way to continuously attack like I was using Thunder Beast while still using my strong spear techniques?

There, two skills had come to mind. The first was continuously using Heroic Strike.

Without mana, it was impossible. There was no doubt about it. However, with mana, which endlessly strengthened and rejuvenated the body, continuously shooting out attacks that concentrated my entire body's strength wasn't so impossible. The mana that should be used to add destructive power could be used for strengthening physical recovery. Although the attacks would then be weaker than a single destructive Heroic Strike, I would be able to attack consecutively with less mana cost. Determining that it was possible, I started to put it into action.

[Hero... You Heroes always advance fast. Without knowing the days of despair that await you, laughing without fear and enjoying the blessing given upon you...!]

“Sorry, I don’t care.”

No matter how much foreshadowing he threw out, I didn’t care. It would appear when it was the right time, and I would overcome it. I wasn’t so bored that I would worry about things that would happen in the future.

[But I will not yield. We will not yield! You bastards that threw me in here, hear me! I never offered my soul to you bastards!]

“Like I said, I... don’t care!”

The air was embroidered with lightning. My muscles and will were focused on a single point on the tip of my spear. However, the mana strengthening the spear also split to protect, rejuvenate, and strengthen my body. To prevent my will from being disrupted, I concentrated. If I was really a Hero, this much should be doable.

Dullahan raised his axe, which flashed with a destructive aura. Right, I knew that someone as smart as you wouldn’t only use that skill when your head was separated.

[Out...burst!!]

“Consecutive Heroic Strikes!”

With my eyes opened wide, I shot my spear forward. At the same time, I thought...

My naming sense sucked.



## Chapter 87. S-Ranker Yeon Hwawoo (4)

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In the blink of an eye, the white lightning stabbed at the axe lashing down. As Dullahan became super-armored while he was using his skills, his axe would not leave his hand no matter how strong a force hit him.

I quickly pulled the spear back and stabbed forward again. In the same spot I just stabbed, I hit again and again. As the technique used most of my mana for protecting my body, the HP cost decreased while the MP cost increased. Each time I thrust my spear out, I used about 3% MP and 1% HP. By the time my seventh attack hit, a crack appeared on his axe. Although Dullahan's eyes opened wide, I did not stop. Eighth, ninth!

[I can block it!]

“You can't!”

[Kuaaaaaaaa!]

Before my tenth attack went in, Ruyue breathed out a large amount of freezing energy. Dullahan's lower body and his axe became covered in frost. Of course, the frost couldn't affect Dullahan in his super-armored state, but it did all allow his axe to make an ominous cracking noise when my spear hit it.

While Dullahan's eyes were wide open in shock, I delivered the eleventh and twelfth stabs. The crack on the axe became bigger. At the same time, it was just centimeters away from hitting the

ground. The moment before Outburst was activated, I gave Peika as much mana as possible. Then, I transferred the mana protecting my body to the tip of my spear. Just like that, I made my last attack.

“Break!”

[Rubbish!]

The result, of course, wasn't rubbish. The moment the radiant lightning struck his axe, the crack on the axe expanded, making the axe shatter. After breaking the axe, my spear continued forward, striking Dullahan's chest.

[Critical Hit!]

[Kahak!]

Letting go of his axe handle, Dullahan tumbled on the ground. It seemed he received a huge shock, as he had even let go of his head that he had been carefully protecting. At the same time, the message I was somewhat waiting for rang out in my ear.

[You created the skill, 'White Lightning Consecutive Strike!' With an exquisite control over vitality and magic, you deliver fast and strong stabs consecutively, then deliver a final uncontrollably powerful strike! For each stab, you use 1% of

your HP and 3% of your MP, while the final strike uses 15% of your HP and MP! This skill can only be used by its creator. As the skill's creator, the skill level is adjusted to low-rank level 8.]

[You created a skill! White Lightning Consecutive Strike is the highest-class spear technique, adopted from 'Heroic Strike.' This skill, which is impossible to use without a deep understanding of vitality and magic, will make all enemies feel overwhelming awe and respect. You obtained 1 skill point as reward. Current skill points: 12]

I had done it. That was the first thing I thought. The moment I delivered the final blow, I had felt the technique become a much stronger skill than Heroic Strike. Controlling my mana to protect, rejuvenate, and strengthen the body, while focusing my body's energy to the tip of my spear, was hard to the point that I wanted to vomit. However, I had done it and the reward was extremely sweet. Not even the throbbing pain in my arm could take away from the happiness I was feeling. However, why did it become White Lightning Consecutive Strike, instead of Heroic Consecutive Strike?

[Kuaaaaaaa!]

Having been separated from his head, Dullahan had lost his sanity and charged toward me. Now that he had lost his weapon, I was wondering what he was using as a weapon. Surprisingly, it was his black horse! That thing wasn't dead yet!?

[Kiaaaaaaa!]

“You crazy son of a bitch!”

Dullahan grabbed the black horse’s back leg and swung the horse at me like a sword with his brute strength. Setting aside the argument of whether the black horse was suitable weapon or not, its sheer size put enormous pressure on me. I first hastily fell back, then decided to test the second skill that could be useful in this situation.

The second skill wasn’t anything special. It was a fancier version of the spear extending technique I had been using for a long time now. I would make a spear blade made of mana and imbue the mana blade with elementals. It was a weaker version of Elemental Tempest.

“Elementals, come!”

[Spin spin?]

[Is it spin spin?]

“No, but I’d like you to come into my spear blade. Though, you might get a bit dizzy.”

[Are you cutting that rotting undead?]

[It’s going up, down, and swinging left and right!]

[Roller coaster!]

[It's a roller coaster!]

After that, the elementals crazily flocked to the mana spear blade. My spear was normally a little under 3 meters long. I had extended the spear blade by 1 meter through my mana, which extended another meter once the elementals gathered. It was like Sun Wukong's monkey wand. Using it, I slashed down at the black horse's body closing in on me. Every time the elemental mana spear blade collided with the black horse, small explosions occurred from opposing attributes. The skill I created without much thought was incredibly effective.

[Whee, fun!]

[Explode~!]

[Uek, I'm going to puke...]

[Whoo, going up! Going down!]

Ignoring the elementals' voices, I swung my spear repeatedly, meeting Dullahan's black horse swings. As I swung my spear like a lightsaber, pieces of flesh were cut out of the black horse until it died and disappeared into particles. Dullahan continued attacking me without realizing what had happened. Without his sanity and weapon, he wasn't threatening in the slightest. I dug into his

embrace and thrust out my spear.

[Kuaaaaaa!]

B-Boom! When the elemental spear blade touched Dullahan's body, it made consecutive explosions, unable to pierce through. The 2-meter long mana spear blade began to shorten. At the same time, the explosions made Dullahan fall back slowly. By the time the 2-meter spear blade was entirely gone, there was a sizable injury on his chest. I continued to push my spear forward. From the repeated damage he took, Dullahan's defense had been worn down, and my spear pierced him easily.

[Kuk!]

“Die!”

After shaking my spear violently, I quickly pulled it out and kicked Dullahan. From the shock of having his chest pierced, Dullahan was completely vulnerable to the kick and flew back. I didn't miss this opportunity. Calling the elementals once again, I created a long spear blade. I then swung the spear toward Dullahan, who was far away. In the instant that my swing's trajectory lined up with Dullahan's body, I disconnected the flow of mana between my elemental spear blade and spear tip, causing the blade to fly out. I had separated the mana blade only and shot it forward. The experimental technique showed great results. The blade flew in the trajectory I aimed, colliding with Dullahan's head and causing a huge explosion.

[Kuhuk!]

[You learned the active skill, ‘Elemental Blade!’ This outstanding skill, created by an ancient Elementalist, extends the reach of the weapon with elemental-imbued mana, allowing its user to attack several enemies or enemies far away! This skill uses 150 MP per second, and retrieving the skill returns 50% of the MP used. When the blade is sent flying for attack, the MP will not be restored. You learned this skill without anyone’s teaching! The skill level is adjusted to low-rank level 6!]

“It’s unfortunate that I’m not its creator, but it covers both long and close-ranged attacks. What a perfect skill. Well, now for the fin... damn it!”

Although I had not made any special attacks, a crack had appeared on Dullahan’s armor. It was undoubtedly a skill! How did he have so many different skills? As it seemed too late to dodge, I thought I would have to use Dragon Skin, but remembered the Heavy Armor Mastery skill I had just recently learned.

[Heavy Armor Mastery: When equipping heavy armor, your defense increases greatly, and allows you to move more easily. You can also increase your defense by imbuing your armor with mana. The effectiveness increases with skill level.]

Although Dragon Skin was an excellent skill, it had a drawback of drastically lowering my speed, making it hard for me to avoid follow-up attacks. Dragon Skin should only be used as a final resort. Deciding to test out Heavy Armor Mastery's effectiveness, I imbued a portion of my remaining mana into my Skeleton Knight Set. At the same time, I dematerialized Ruyue and put up an ice wall between Dullahan and me. Although it took a while to explain, only 1.7 seconds had passed since Dullahan began to use his skill.

Immediately afterwards, Dullahan's armor exploded and flew out in all directions with black mana. Dozens of armor fragments flew through the ice wall towards me. Dodging what I could, I rushed toward Dullahan.

Pu-buk! With heavy impact force, the armor fragments stuck themselves on my armor, but it seemed the mana-imbued armor was effective, as the armor fragments did not deal a great amount of damage. Ascertaining my victory, I smiled. The Dullahan in front of my eyes did not have his weapon or armor, and was shaking with his head far away from him, trying to pick himself back up.

“You don't have to get up, really.”

[Kuuuu...!]

As if to reply to my taunt, Dullahan groaned and wriggled his body.



As it was disgusting, I decided to end it quickly.

[Choose your reward.]

[1. Brain Strengthening Elixir

2. Dullahan's Giant Axe]

I wondered why, I really did, but Dullahan gave something called the Brain Strengthening Elixir. But why? Was Dullahan actually extremely smart? Even with his head separated from his body? Swallowing down the questions that arose every time I saw Dullahan's reward list, I chose the Brain Strengthening Elixir and consumed it.

[You can think more quickly and your senses are heightened. Your intelligence and magic increase by 1.]

“Oh, lucky. That's already the second stat increase.”

In any case, I was happy with its effects. Not only could I raise my intelligence, which I felt was lacking, but I could also increase magic, which was always great to have more of. I almost felt the timing was too perfect. Though, it was about time an elixir raising intelligence and magic appeared.

“You won again and survived.”

When I left the battle room, Lin was smoking and staring at me, instead of doing his blacksmithing work. As he greeted me with a hint of disappointment, I shrugged.

“I realized I was lacking a lot in ability, so I tried a few things out this time. All in all, I think it was quite successful. I’ll need to do two more battles like the one I just had... I’m going to review the fight for a bit.”

Were there any unnecessary movements? How did Dullahan move and what was the most effective way of dealing with it? What about the black horse? What about the communication between me and Ruyue? Peika’s elemental magic? When would the skills I just acquired be most useful!? There were tons of things to research. I sat down and closed my eyes to meditate, but Lin interrupted me.

“Desire to improve is good, but you should relax a bit and let your body rest. You’ll hurt yourself if you overdo it.”

“Thanks for worrying, Lin.”

“No, now that I’m working on your equipment, I need to get my money. I don’t really care if you die or not.”

“You’re such a tsun... Eh? What money?”

“This. You only gave me the initial deposit, not the cost for the entire thing. You have to pay 100,000 more.”

I turned my gaze to where Lin was pointing with his chin. There, I saw the naked corpse of a woman, wrapped in a thin cloth... it was the succubus' corpse. Although it was wrapped with cloth, as it was see-through, the succubus' naked body was in full view. Even her head was perfectly sewn back, making her look like a sleeping woman. Of course, my cheeks flushed bright red.

“W-What!? Why is she naked!?”

“What's up with that virgin response? That's a common way to take the spiritual power from its physical body.”

“I've never seen that before...”

“I don't know about Earth's culture. In any case, that's the most basic knowledge any monster artifact blacksmith should know. The parts I want from the succubus, its eyes and wings, I already have set aside here. The eye will be the core of the artifact, and I'm going to use the same method to take the mana out of the wings.”

He took out a glass bottle and showed two golden eyes floating around in an unknown liquid. The succubus' eyes really did seem to have special powers, as they continued to glow inside the glass bottle.

“Turns out, this guy was a boss-rank monster. That’s why the succubus had a special magic power. You can look forward to it.”

“I, I’m not sure what you’re talking about, but I’m going to meditate.”

“Ha, this is why virgins are... well, I’m sure noonim will be happy... two virgins, how fitting.”

I didn’t hear him. I didn’t hear that draconian’s words! Hypnotizing myself, I fell into meditation. Of course, for the next 10 minutes, only the image of a naked woman popped up in my head. Damn it!

## Chapter 88. S-Ranker Yeon Hwawoo (5)

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[You equipped the Dullahan Set. Your strength and constitution increase by 17. When the Dullahan Set is equipped, you can use 'Outburst' once per day.]

[Your brain is strengthened to its peak. Your intelligence and magic increase by 3. It seems consuming more of this item will have no further effect.]

“Hu, it’s over...”

I wondered why, but it felt like I had finished grinding in only a day. In reality, it had taken a little over a month to do so. Although I almost died a few times in the process, I managed to complete the grind without dying a single time. The sense of accomplishment made my confidence rise. More importantly, I got rid of my habit of trying to take out Floor Master skills whenever something happened.

My mental protection was much better as well. I still thought my intelligence update was slow, but I would not make the same shameful mistake again as I did at the MT.

“I’m glad the set equipment skill is Outburst. In the worst case scenario, it could have been Sudden Rise...”

[That’s creepy.]

[Scary!]

Peika and Ruyue shouted in disgust at my monologue. Someone on the floor getting beaten suddenly getting up. It was indeed something from a horror movie. I patted Peika and Ruyue while laughing, and saved Outburst in the 7 o'clock position. Even though I shouldn't rely too much on Floor Master skills, they were undoubtedly part of my strength. With these incredibly strong skills in my arsenal, I couldn't be unhappy.

There were now 7 skills stored in Collector's Pocket Watch. Looking at the gems in the clock positions, I smiled. Tomorrow was the day I would go to Britain's Windermere. It was great that I could finish grinding the 35th floor before then. Starting from now, it was time to get to the 40th floor before Hwaya came to pick me up on a plane!

Just when I was about to step on the staircase to the 36th floor, Ellos contacted me.

[Shin! We broke through the 30th floor yesterday.]

“You... That's really fast! It hasn't even been three months yet.”

[You see, we got more party members. It would have been nice to stick to just the three of us, but we realized we shouldn't be so adamant about it.]

“It’s still fast.”

[I learned a lot from you that day. The party members we added were explorers who had stayed on the 25th floor for years without being able to advance. Even if they couldn’t break through the 25th floor, they had survived against the invaders during that time. Together, we challenged the Giant Ghoul, and though it’s a bit embarrassing, we imitated you and managed to break through. We did get wiped out once on our way to the 30th floor, but we still managed to get here pretty fast. And... I’m still surprised, but we managed to beat the 30th floor’s Skeleton Knight without losing any party members. We were together with a pretty amazing explorer though.]

“Amazing explorer?”

[Yeah. It was a young man named Ren. We only had seven people including him, but he complained about something not dropping and didn’t want to wait for more. I almost thought he was you, with how calm he was.]

“ ... ”

Ren! You finished grinding the 25th floor and were already on the 30th floor!?

[He was really amazing. He still couldn’t be compared to you, but his planning, movements, and claymore techniques were truly excellent. We were really shocked when he pushed the Skeleton Knight back in a one on one fight. Fighting against a Floor Master

alone... I didn't think there was another explorer who could do it other than you, Shin.]

“Ah, yeah...”

[Thanks to him, we cleared the 30th floor in one go, and for helping my continent's explorers grow, his Highness allowed me to meet our continent's Hero. He even taught me a little. It was all thanks to you, Shin.]

“No, it's the result of your effort. I wouldn't say it was because of me. I'm only taking care of myself, but you're also leading five other comrades. Ellos, you should be proud.”

[... Thanks, Shin. One day, I hope I can stand by your side again.]

“You will soon.”

I couldn't tell him that I had already finished grinding the 35th floor and was about to head to the 36th floor. However, the moment my conversation with Ellos ended, Palludia called me as well, almost as if they had planned it out together. Surprisingly, the content was the same as well.

[I broke through the 30th floor! Without even a single party member dying! Kang Shin, where are you now?]

“I broke through the 35th floor.”



[Oh, I see... well, it doesn't matter. I don't care at all, I was just asking.]

Although she sounded extremely disappointed, I didn't point it out and she didn't yield.

[Anyways! Don't forget, you said you'd come over this week with food from Earth!]

“Yeah, I know. I'll bring lots. You said you broke through without losing a single party member? That's great. Good work.”

[Ah, mm. If you leave it to Palludia Gren Ehuir-nim, it's a piece of cake! ... Though a slightly annoying guy helped us.]

I suddenly felt a sense of uneasiness.

“Is that person's name perhaps...”

[Ren. He said his name was Ren. He was really tall, very muscular, and had messy blonde hair. He couldn't talk while facing me. He kept blushing, so it was annoying.]

Ren...! You couldn't look at Ludia because she was too pretty!

[Apparently, he's been helping explorers advance since the 25th floor. I hear people are calling him the Golden Lion of 30F.]

“That’s a very interesting nickname.”

On the 25th floor and 30th floor, I beat the bosses solo, so I didn’t really meet any other explorers. Although the 25th and 30th floor has less explorers than the lower floors, there were still quite a lot of people stuck there. As a result of Ren carrying them through in my place, he had received an excellent nickname!

I made up my mind to call Ren ‘Golden Lion’ the next time I saw him. Thanking Ludia inwardly for letting me know this good piece of info, I ended the conversation. Then I received another message. When I checked who it came from, it was unexpectedly Ye-Eun.

[Shin, I’m not getting this compressing elixir thing.]

“What?”

I tilted my head. Three weeks had passed since Ye-Eun became an explorer. Considering her abilities, she was rather slow. I was wondering why she was only just now contacting me, but it seemed there was a problem.

“Did you defeat it solo?”

[Ah, yeah, I did the first time and got a Deific Manifestation Magic Book. It said it was going to call someone. I got scared so I haven’t tried it out yet.]

“Try it soon. Whoever gets summoned might be helpful. So, you didn’t clear it solo after that?”

[No. I cleared it in a 10-man party, but it didn’t come out. I tried again with 8 people just in case, but it didn’t drop anything again.]

“Really...?”

[Then I tried with 5 people, then 2, but it still didn’t drop.]

“Really? Why?”

[I didn’t think Shin would lie to me, so I kept trying for two weeks after that, constantly changing the number of people in the party, but the compressing elixir never came out. The Floor Shop owner said he didn’t know anything about it.]

“...”

Her trust in me was... heavy...!

[But I had fun! Orc Lord was an interesting guy! The people in my party weren’t scared of me either... hehe, I’m having fun lately!]

Fighting the Orc Lord was fun? She really had an innate talent for this. With a bitter smile that couldn’t reach her, I spoke.

“I’ll ask someone I know why the compressing elixirs won’t drop. Just wait a bit.”

[Okay.]

I paused my conversation with her and thought for a while. Why didn’t the compressing elixirs drop? What was the problem? As I couldn’t think of any reason, I went and asked Lin. Lin was in the middle of inscribing something onto a gem radiating golden light. It seemed he was close to finishing the mental protection item I asked for. At this rate, wouldn’t I break through the 40th floor first? No, it was good to have more than one way to protect myself from mental attacks. If possible, I should try to get as many skills and items that helped...

“Am I distracting you?”

“My concentration won’t be shaken by just talking with you, so feel free.”

“Alright... Lin, you see, I made a friend of mine from Earth into a dungeon explorer. She’s an A-rank Awakened from what I can tell.”

“And?”

“Her contribution should have been high enough, but compressing elixirs never appear on her reward list for defeating the Orc Lord. Do you know why?”

“It’s probably not just the compressing elixir. She probably isn’t getting boss set items either.”

Lin said casually. I instinctively understood.

“Is there a problem with her? Like having an ability?”

“Oh? So you already know.”

“But what about me? I awakened my ability, but I could still obtain elixirs.”

“You got your ability after you became a dungeon explorer. Not to mention, your ability is the type that grows along with your level and training. Of course your accomplishments would be acknowledged normally.”

“You mean my friend’s accomplishments won’t be acknowledged normally?”

“You... Think about it. What do you think determines what comes up on reward lists from defeating bosses?”

Lin asked me as he put the powder he shaved off from the gem into a separate bowl. After thinking about it for a bit, I answered.

“Don’t better items come out if you defeat the boss in a more

technical and overwhelming way?”

“You’re only partially right. You’re missing one important thing. It’s compared to your true ability.”

“You mean, because my friend’s strength is above the standard, her accomplishments can’t be assessed properly even if she defeats the Orc Lord overwhelmingly?”

“Exactly. Looks like you’re starting to use your head.”

“But... Compared to other explorers, my stats are also above the standard from compressing and strengthening elixirs.”

“You’re within the dungeon’s scope, so you’re fine.”

“I understand.”

In other words, things I gained from the dungeon’s system didn’t act as a minus when calculating my accomplishments. On the other hand, Ye-Eun, who became a dungeon explorer after already having an A-rank strength, had strength that went above the dungeon’s standard. Since she defeated the Orc Lord with such strength, she could not get the appropriate reward from the Orc Lord. It was similar to how my superior strength lowered the reward of the B-rank Event Raid. It made sense.

“She says she got the Deific Manifestation Magic Book and the title.”

“Those are fixed rewards... Do I need to explain more?”

“Yes. What floor does she need to get to before she can get proper rewards from the dungeon?”

“I don’t know. I don’t really care how strong your world’s A-rank is. What rank are you?”

“S-rank.”

“Mm, taking into account how strong she would get from level-up stat bonuses and titles, probably... 50th floor?”

Oh no, say goodbye to Skin Strengthening Elixirs, Ye-Eun. It was a good thing I didn’t tell her about them. With a bitter smile, I told Ye-Eun what I’d just heard. Ye-Eun seemed rather fine with it.

[That’s great! So I can just keep going up while defeating things alone, right?]

“Yeah, but don’t skimp out on opportunities to grow your ability. Stealth and... what was it?”

[Dagger technique! I got two wooden daggers when I entered the dungeon. I like it, since it’s a lot cleaner than fighting with my hands.]

“Ah, I see. Anyways, make sure you level those skills up. You’re going to regret it later otherwise.”

[Thanks for worrying. See you later!]

“Deific Manifestation. Don’t forget to try it out.”

[Okay! I’ll catch up to you soon, so don’t go too fast, okay?]

With that, Ye-Eun ended our call. Sorry, Ye-Eun, I can’t do that. There’s a bet on the line..

“By the way, Kang Shin.”

“Yes?”

Lin was still digging at the gem as he spoke.

“That friend, [she’s a girl](#), right?”

Pronouns are gender-neutral most of the time. Although he said ‘she’ in the translation, he hasn’t actually revealed Ye-Eun’s gender.

“... Yes.”

“Oh? A girl. Heh.”



Lin made an evil smile.

“Of course, I felt it was weird that a Hero didn’t have a girl or two. Kuku, noonim might end up only staring at the roof again, kukuku.”

“We’re just friends, so don’t misunderstand. And don’t talk like there’s something between Loretta and me. ... Again?”

“Oh? You’re curious? You’re curious, eh? Maybe noonim has a chance this time. Ha.”

“I, I’m not curious at all.”

... Yep, I wasn’t curious. Nope, not in the slightest. I only asked just because. And since that was the case, I stepped on the 36th floor staircase with a totally fine expression.

“Ahuk!”

“That guy, he’s quite agitated...”

“I, I only missed my step, ahuk!”

“At this rate, your vitality will hit zero from hitting the steps before you even make it to the 36th floor.”

I, I'm going to break through the 40th floor today! For sure!

# Chapter 89. Crimson Roar (1)

---

[Kukuku, it's him.]

[A new one has come.]

The moment I commenced exploration on the 36th floor, I calmed down from the whispers I heard. The pathway was much wider than usual, and the walls even had windows, letting me see outside the dungeon.

This was the first time windows had appeared in the dungeon. Furthermore, beyond the windows was a pitch-black night and a purple-colored moon. I touched the windows, curious as to what world was beyond the dungeon, but I instinctively realized I could not break the windows with my ability. Not that I would have anyways.

What was more important were the voices I heard. I looked around once again. I saw something pale reflected in the windows. I closed my eyes and tried to detect any presences in the surroundings. However, I could not sense anything. It was almost like the time I first climbed to the 6th floor. The only difference was that I could not see anything this time.

However, I had prepared for something like this happening.

“Peika.”

[Thunder Wave!]

Peika waved her folding fan, and along its trajectory a radiant golden wave undulated out into all directions. As I was growing as an Elementalist, Peika's ability was also growing. When Peika used her skill, the surroundings became loud.

[Kuk, an elemental!]

[It's a stronger elemental than we thought!]

I opened my eyes and held my Silver Bone Crossbow. At Peika's wide-scope attack, the monsters that were hiding made their appearance. They were human apparitions, pale white in color. I somewhat knew what they were. They were right above the apparitions that I had fought from the 6th to 10th floor, the wraiths. These guys were ghosts! They were also undead monsters.

“Ruyue, come into my crossbow.”

[Okay!]

Without hesitation, Ruyue dematerialized and infused herself into the crossbow. Soon, the white Silver Bone Crossbow began to emit a blue freezing energy. I aimed the crossbow and started shooting. Although my Crossbow Marksmanship was only low-rank, with the addition of mid-rank Spirit Aura, the bolts carried formidable power.

[Kik! He's shooting at us!]

[Attack, attack him!]

[Don't let him shoot!]

The ghosts created pale white balls in their hands and threw them at me. I assumed they were a stronger version of the 9th floor wraiths' ectoplasm arrows. In any case, Peika did not let them attack freely.

The folding fan in her hand shook, and a wave of lightning once again undulated, shooting out bolts of lightning as it expanded outward. Just from the stray bolts, the ghosts took damage and flinched. Without missing this opportunity, I shot out bolts consecutively and shot down the ghosts that had been affected by Peika's lightning.

As I often felt, Peika and Ruyue's attributes really complemented each other well. When I took turns using their attacks, the amount of damage I dealt increased exponentially. The ghosts frantically ran around trying to dodge my bolt attacks, but became paralyzed after being hit by the lightning wave Peika emitted periodically. Once they were paralyzed, my bolts infused with Ruyue's power penetrated their foreheads.

One hit was enough to take care of most of them, and those that survived surely died by the second hit. When I killed them so easily (though I had a Mana Potion in my mouth), the wraiths seemed to have realized the gravity of the situation.

[If we run, that arrogant man will kill us.]

[Attack him together.]

[One who disrupts our rest, become the sacrifice for our amusement.]

Ghosts flocked at me from all directions. Even without having to use Provoke, they gathered in large numbers incredibly fast. I ordered Peika to increase the output of Thunder Wave and ran forward. Aiming my crossbow at the ghosts in front of me, I shouted.

“A ghost in here has 8th grade syndrome!”

Did you think I didn’t notice, you damned ghosts!?

---

“Oppa, why are you lying on the couch?”

As I was about take a nap on the couch, I woke up naturally from the voice of an angel. Yua was in her school uniform and had her bag. It seemed she had just come back from school. Today was December 23rd. Although my college went on winter break after the finals, Yua was still in high school and thus had to go to school until the end of the month.

“Mm, oppa was in the dungeon until just recently. Oppa is having a bit of trouble.”

I had wanted to advance to the 40th floor, but even after 10 hours of shooting crossbow bolts and Peika’s lightning shower, I was only on the 37th floor. The sheer number of ghosts was one thing, but the difficulty also came from the fact that normal attacks could not hurt them. My Crossbow Marksmanship did level up a lot as a result, though...

Most importantly, compared to the past, the pathway was much longer, to the point that it made me grit my teeth. Using the Dash skill, I ran without rest while using elemental magic and my crossbow, but it had taken me over 10 hours to go through the 36th floor. If I was this slow, how would the other explorers fare? I could only grit my teeth.

“But oppa, if you’re going to sleep, you should do it in your bed. Otherwise, you’ll catch a cold.”

At Yua’s question, I checked the time. It was 4 in the afternoon. It was about time to leave.

“Remember what oppa told father, mother, and Yua? That I’d be going outside of Korea for a few days to help a friend out. It was almost time to go, so I was just taking a nap.”

“Ah, right... Is it really not dangerous?”

“Of course not. I can come back immediately if it gets dangerous, so don’t worry.”

Though that’s unlikely to happen. Seeing Yua’s worried frown, I patted her head a few times and got up. After contracting Ruyue, I became immune to the winter weather. I put on a black suit and took out and put on Otus’ Secret from my inventory. With that, I was done getting ready.

“Hm, hiding my identity is going to be a pain.”

This time, I was going to Britain, not as Yeon Hwawoo, but as Thunder Knight. As such, I made myself look different than Yeon Hwawoo using Otus’ Secret. When I was Yeon Hwawoo, my hair had a hint of grey. This time, I made my hair platinum blonde. As I wanted to make sure I would not be compared with Yeon Hwawoo, I even made my body look a bit more like my real self. My eyes, which could be seen from beneath the mask, were made red. When I looked at myself in the mirror, a third person that wasn’t Kang Shin or Yeon Hwawoo was in the mirror wearing a suspicious mask.

Perfect.

... I would probably have to use this opportunity to tell Hwaya my real name. She thought of me as her true friend, and she would realize that I’d been lying to a certain extent once she saw my appearance. Since she’s smart, she would probably realize that the appearance I showed her the first time we met was false.



“What about Dad? Is he not going with you?”

“He said he quit being Dark Knight.”

Not that he would be able to do so easily! Although I told him about Britain, he was currently rushing through the dungeon, saying he wanted to break through the 45th floor before the end of the year. I was 100% sure he wouldn't be able to do it, but I only wished him good luck and gave up convincing him otherwise.

“I'm worried if it's just oppa...”

“Oppa's strong. I went on TV too, remember?”

“By the way, who's your friend, oppa?”

“H-Hm?”

“... Oppa?”

Yua's eyes became sharp ever so slightly. Was Yua planning on asking this from the start? I tried to smile as I answered.

“The friend is British. I'm also going to Britain.”

“Wow, how did you meet a British friend?”

“H-Hm? Ah, you see, that person is half-Korean! We met in Korea, and that person turned out to be an ability user.”

“Oppa... is that person a girl?”

How did she find out!? There shouldn't have been any hints!

“Oppa, you don't have to hide it or anything. The only difference is whether your friend is female or male.”

“Haha, you're right, she's a girl.”

“Hehe... I knew it.”

Strange... I never felt cold since I contracted Ruyue, but my body was slightly shaking. Was there a cold-controlling monster nearby!? When I tensed and raised my guard up to the limit, Yua delivered an additional surprise attack.

“Oppa, is the place you're going Britain's Windermere Lake?”

She got me!

“H-How did you know?”

“Huhu, it's all the talk in the news right now. The dungeon that appeared in the tourist attraction known for its natural beauty,

and the SS-ranker Hwaya Mastiford who was summoned back to her country during her stay in Korea.”

“A-Ah! I see!”

“She’s your friend, right?”

“...”

My sister might be much smarter than me, even with my now above 40 intelligence...!

“... When did you become so friendly? With someone so strong.”

“Yua, oppa’s going to be late. I’ll explain later. Yua’s a good girl, so I trust you’ll stay at home without causing trouble.”

“Ah, oppa.”

“Okay, I’ll be sure to buy you a present on my way back. If something happens, remember to call me, okay?”

“Oppa, that’s not fair... I wanted to hear your answer.”

“We met each other through work and became friends. I’ll explain properly later, so study hard and wait. Okay, yua?”

“Okay...”

Yua pouted as she reluctantly answered. It had been a while since my obedient sister openly showed discontent, and I couldn't help but laugh. Now that I thought about it, she often showed such responses when I met with other girls, like that time with Ye-Eun. Was she jealous that another girl would steal her oppa away? No, I knew it was impossible, but that's what I wanted to think!

I stroked her hair a few times and left the house, heading towards the place we promised to meet. Platinum hair, red eyes, and mask. When I arrived at the location with an appearance even I wanted to punch, there was a limousine waiting for me.

“Mastiford-ssi sent me here.”

“Then excuse me.”

Hwaya was an SS-ranker. If that was hard to understand, I could put it this way.

Hwaya was one of the seven most importantly regarded people on Earth.

Simply put, any nation would prepare anything she wished for, whether it was a limousine, private jet, or yacht. She could be said to hold omnipotent authority. Of course, the amount of responsibility she had to bear was equally big.

Furthermore, Britain especially tried to fulfill her requests in order to cut her ties with Korea as much as possible. No matter how suspicious or irrational her requests were, they would fulfill them without objection. It was also why I was going to Gimpo International Airport in a limousine. The driver didn't say anything and neither did I. It was the same as I got on the private plane waiting for me at the airport. Only after I sat down in my seat did I finally let out a breath.

“This plane is going straight to Britain's Heathrow Airport. We will take off at 5:10 PM, ten minutes after the Skunk Plane takes off.”

After Two Moon, people were desperate to clear the monsters from land, ocean, and sky, securing routes for cars, ships, and planes to travel. As the ocean was filled with large number of huge, powerful monsters, a few harbors had to be given up, but humans reclaimed the skies rather easily. We had discovered a monster that emitted an odor detested by flying monsters. We had developed a technology that scattered this substance in the air and prevented it from dissipating for a fixed period of time. Skunk Planes were the planes tasked with scattering this substance in the air and securing a safe route for ordinary planes to travel.

Of course, this smell did not affect all flying monsters. The odor was useless against monsters like wyverns or manticores, but otherwise, the Skunk Planes did their jobs fantastically. It was a monumental victory, as human wisdom had defeated the monsters' rampage. It was also why I could go to Britain on a plane.

“We will arrive at the Heathrow Airport at 1:20 PM, London time. Afterwards, we will take the limousine waiting at the airport and arrive at the Windermere Lake District in 4 hours.”

The flight that had taken 12 hours in the past only took 5 hours now. This great improvement could, of course, be credited to the source of energy found after Two Moon: the Bluestones. Monster remains were also being used as materials for core parts of planes, ships, trains, etc. All this had happened within a year of the Two Moon incident. Humans’ ability to adapt was really... Every time the thought crossed my mind, I couldn’t help but think humans of other worlds. Although their civilizations might be different than ours, they were still humans.

What could have driven them to the brink of extinction? What had driven them to a corner? No matter how much I thought about it, I could not come up with an answer.

“We’ll be taking off soon.”

Nodding my head at the flight attendant’s announcement, I leaned against the flight seat. Although I was generally not sleepy, because of fighting Dullahan without getting much sleep and focusing on clearing the 36th floor, fatigue had built up in my body.

Even sitting here and doing nothing made my body itch to do something, but I had no other choice. Since there was extra time, I had to make use of it to get some rest. Imagining finding myself in London when I woke up, I closed my eyes. A+-rank Field Dungeon... I was looking forward to it.

## Chapter 90. Crimson Roar (2)

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Even in winter, Windermere was beautiful. A few ships were tied to a dock and a silver lake was spread out beyond it. The nearby town was small and had clean, pretty roads.

However, the people there had deathly pale faces and were mostly ability users. In the lake, a large tuna-like thing jumped up every once in a while, then disappeared back below the surface. Those guys, weren't they in the wrong place? This wasn't the ocean, it was a lake!

“You're late!”

I turned my head at the slightly piercing voice that called out to me. Hwaya, who was running towards me with a smile after I got out of the limousine, suddenly frowned. She must have realized my appearance was different than the last time we met.

I wasn't just covering my face in a way that would hide that I was 'Yeon Hwawoo.' My entire facial structure, hair color, and eye color were different. It meant that I had a way of changing my appearance, and that the appearance of Yeon Hwawoo I showed Hwaya before would have a chance to be false. In that case, it was normal that she would doubt whether my name even was Yeon Hwawoo.

“You...”

“Sorry, Hwaya.”

“Y-You....”

Hwaya seemed to have realized the truth from my apology as she clenched her fists. Then, she unclenched them softly.

“Haa, I understand.”

“Thanks. I’ll tell you more about it later. You know why I did it, right?”

“If you lie again, I’m going to pull out your hair, and you’d better tell me properly later. Show me your real appearance too.”

“Don’t worry.”

“Good... Well, thanks for coming... and for believing in me.”

After a light hug, we shook hands. Behind her, I saw three other ability users. As Hwaya greeted me, they watched us with curious gazes. Hwaya then turned and introduced me to them.

“He’s Thunder Knight.”

“Hey!”

“Oh!”



“Thunder Knight!”

“That’s him? How young!”

They each spouted awestruck words and stared at me fixedly. Hwaya then bragged without any hint of unhappiness.

“Didn’t I tell you? That I was an acquaintance of Thunder Knight!”

“Amazing, Mastiford. I didn’t think you could really call him here.”

“Not to mention, I didn’t think I’d see the face of someone who never revealed his identity. Though, he’s still wearing a mask.”

Without showing any signs of doubting Hwaya’s words, the three ability users showed interest in me, seemingly with good first impressions. At their following questions, I tried to use my beginner level English to barely respond to them. I was thankful I could understand them properly. British accents were difficult...

Damn, Korea really needed to teach English on a conversation level basis! The English I learned in my first semester of college was more helpful than the English I studied for the SATs!

“Oh, poor Brightman.”

“Thunder Knight is quite handsome, and he’s young!”

“Hahahaha!”

I didn’t know why they were laughing. Even though I changed my hair to platinum blonde and had red eyes, since I didn’t change my skin-color, they should have realized I wasn’t Caucasian. Even so, they treated me favorably. I was glad.

Hwaya shook her hands as if to shoo away their useless talk, then introduced them to me. They were S-rank ability users. Mike Dellon, a man in his 30’s, was a magician who could command over ten different kinds of water magic, and Paul Bacchus, a man in his 40’s, was a dual shield wielder. There was apparently nothing he could not block.

However, I was surprised when I heard he could only strengthen shields with his mana. Since I couldn’t imbue mana into my crossbow either, I imagined it was similar to that. That said, as long as he could wield mana, he should be able to wield other weapons if he practiced... Well, it wasn’t something I should be concerned about.

The last member was Emily Brown, a woman in her early 50’s with well-aged blonde hair. She was the owner of the precious healing ability.

“Amazing, right? There are only ten S-rank healers in the world and Madam Brown is one of them!”

“It’s nice to meet you, Thunder Knight.”

“... Nice to meet you too, Madam Brown.”

I wanted to stop them from calling me Thunder Knight. What could I do? After thinking about it for a bit, I came up with a plan.

“You can call me John Smith...”

“How about we call you T.K., short for Thunder Knight?”

“Please don’t, Hwaya.”

[Then hurry up and say your real name.]

[Like I can say it here.]

“Alright then, T.K.”

This girl, she really was angry...! In the end, because of Hwaya, my nickname became T.K. In any case, I couldn’t help but look at them curiously after being introduced to the three ability users.

“I didn’t think everyone would come to receive me, but I’m surprised how distinguished everyone here is. Wasn’t there another S-ranker? Why isn’t that person here?”

“That person’s with the other SS-ranker who’s not here.”

“Wow... But it’s not even dinner time yet...”

At my words, Hwaya’s face reddened slightly and she lightly kicked my shin. Then, as a result of kicking my leg that was stronger than steel, she held her foot and jumped in place.

“No, stupid! That S-ranker is a man! He’s just following Joshua Brightman around!”

“Uek, he’s into men? That’s even worse...”

“You idiot!”

“I’m kidding, kidding.”

There couldn’t be that many ability users here, but it seemed factions had already developed. I was happy that Hwaya’s side had more S-rankers, but the member composition was rather strange. There were two long-ranged magicians, one person to block monsters’ attacks up close, and one healer to heal them. It wasn’t bad, but there was one thing missing.

“There’s no one to kill monsters in melee range. Is that why you called me, Hwaya?”

In gaming terms, they were missing a close-range damage dealer. At my question, the three S-rankers wore bitter expressions, while Hwaya let out a sigh. It seemed there was a reason behind it.

“Other than you, other countries sent their S-rankers to help.”

“Yeah, I know.”

“Because I was annoyed with Brightman, I suggested that with the added people, we split our forces into two and explore the dungeon in separate ships. After all, that should be faster.”

“Yeah, that makes sense. It’s a good idea.”

“When we were discussing it, Brightman agreed to it wholeheartedly, but when the other countries’ S-rankers came, they all said they would only join Brightman’s group. They said he was more trustworthy than me.”

“I wonder how much that trust cost...?”

Shoot, so Hwaya’s side actually had less people.

As expected of a chaebol. His scale really was different. To think he could make S-rankers, who generally did not lack anything, come to his side. It probably wasn’t just money that did it. Adults were scary!

While I was wearing an amazed look, Hwaya's complaints continued.

“As a result, for the past few days, we couldn't even delve that deeply into the dungeon. With only Paul in the front, we shot out our magic attacks... and today, Brightman said, ‘Wouldn't it be bad to continue like this, Miss Mastiford? How about we change our strategy?’ Argh! So annoying! I want to burn him up!”

As Hwaya complained, little balls of flame sparked around her. Paul, Mike, and Madam Brown, who could be considered her party members, nodded their heads as if they were also thinking about what happened. I asked.

“But not all of the S-rankers went to his side, right? After all, they're S-rankers. They shouldn't be lacking anything.”

“Ah, of course, there were people who wanted to join my party too, but they were all schemers who were trying to do something with my fame, and the way they were looking at me... Uuu. I refused them all, saying I didn't need them.”

“You really are a cool woman.”

“Paul and Mike here don't have any ulterior motives. Unlike Brightman whose head is only filled with money and women, they know what's important, and that's thinking of our country first! Ah, it's the same for Madam Brown, of course! With her on our side, Brightman's side only has an A+-rank healer.”

With Hwaya laughing as if to say ‘it serves you right,’ I also responded with a laugh.

“I thought something was weird when you sent a plane so hastily. Then are we going there right now? I haven’t fought any fish monsters before, so I’m pretty excited.”

In truth, my body was itching for a fight. After sleeping on the plane, I wanted to get some exercise. I mean, just look at that tuna-shaped monster! It was undoubtedly delicious. I was sure of it, 100 percent! Come to think of it, I hadn’t eaten that boar in the dungeon’s Residential Area either. I needed to drain the blood and dismantle it soon...

However, after hearing what I said, Hwaya tilted her head rather cutely with a ‘huh?’ Then, she spoke as she blinked at me slowly.

“What are you talking about? The boat’s not going anywhere today. We were already on it for nine hours today, and it’s almost time for evening tea. Work hour is clearly over.”

“You’re kidding...”

“Yeah, I was kidding.”

“Hey!”

“But it’s true that we aren’t hunting any more monsters today. You only just came. There’s jet leg to worry about, so you should

rest.”

I was dumbfounded at Hwaya’s words that seemed to say, ‘don’t overwork yourself and rest.’ I was thankful she was worrying about me, but did she really think that way?

“Are you treating me like a normal person after acknowledging me as an S-ranker...?”

“He’s right, Mastiford. The bodies of us melee type ability users aren’t weak like yours, who, as an SS-ranker, faints often from anemia.”

Paul, who was a melee ability user like me, assisted me. Hwaya then retorted.

“I don’t faint from anemia! I just get dizzy from using up my mana!”

“You should watch how much mana you have left.”

“You think that’s easy?”

Was it because Hwaya’s mana was too strong? It seemed she had a tendency to use it unsparingly. Because of it, she was getting anemia from mana exhaustion. As I felt the same way the last time I partied with her for the Event Dungeon, I decided to warn her about it this time.



“If you faint, your party members will be in danger. No matter how much mana you have, you need to practice controlling how much you spend.”

[But I can't see my MP on Earth.]

[Don't rely on the gauge, rely on the feeling.]

[You think that's easy!? Can you do it?]

[Isn't that obvious?]

[Obvious...!? You, can you really do it?]

As we started talking in private messages in the middle, we must have looked like we were having a glaring contest to the others. Paul and Mike thought we were fighting and stepped in.

“I think you guys need to calm down.”

“It's thanks to Mastiford's magic that we're able to do so much with just the four of us. T.K., as her acquaintance, you should know how amazing she is.”

“Of course I do, but she could be even more amazing if she tried.”

“Uk...”

At my words, Hwaya shrunk back. With how prideful she was, she should dislike others pointing out her flaws. The air heated up quickly. I was prepared for a ball of flame to fly my way. When I prepared myself for it, Hwaya unclenched her fists. Then, with her eyes burning like flames, she glared at me and spoke.

“If you can do it, there’s no way I can’t.”

“Ha, that’s more like it.”

This is what I liked about her. Someone who was proud but could understand her flaws could always increase her self-worth.

“So teach me. Don’t tell me you can’t?”

“No, I can do at least that much.”

“Good, then after dinner, come to my place. I can at least offer you milk tea.”

“Got it... Hm?”

Eh? Did I hear what I think I just heard? While I was standing there just blinking blankly, Paul, who had walked past me before I noticed, spoke while grinning.

“Wow, I knew something was up when she kept bragging that Thunder Knight was her acquaintance, but I didn’t think THE Mastiford would invite a man to her room... If Brightman found out, he would lose it.”

Mike, who was younger compared to Paul, placed his hand on my shoulder and advised.

“Be careful of Brightman, my friend. I don’t know what that man would do out of jealousy.”

“Um... Thanks for the advice...”

I retorted while taking Mike’s hand off of me.

Also, Madam Brown! Don’t give me a thumbs up with that radiant smile. It’s annoying!

## Chapter 91. Crimson Roar (3)

---

Compared to Korean people, British people were more relaxed. No, perhaps I shouldn't generalize all British people with just them. It could just be that the ability users here were like that.

Was it because they were repeatedly hunting the same area for several weeks? They didn't seem concerned with clearing the dungeon anytime soon, as they ate dinner and sipped on red tea while they watched tunas splashing above the lake's surface.

“Ah, it's raining.”

“It should stop soon, though it'll come back later.”

“Does it snow here too?”

“When it gets cold enough. It's the same as in Korea.”

Hwaya had rented an entire residence in Windermere as her lodging place. Currently, it was just the two of us in a small room on the second floor of her residence. Hwaya was drinking red tea while blankly watching the rain outside the window. Her flame-red eyes were calm, and her smooth, fluttery red hair was the only bright spot in the undecorated, bland room.

Seeing her holding her teacup, I thought she really looked beautiful, like she was a painting. Then, before I noticed, she turned to my direction and looked at me with half-closed eyes.

“Can you not stare at me so fixedly?”

“... Sorry. You were so beautiful that I lost myself for a bit.”

“... Huh, I’m usually happy to get compliments, but because I’ve been getting them from people I hate recently, I’m sick of them. Sorry.”

“You really are honest... I’m the one who’s sorry for reminding you of them, but I didn’t actually mean it in a flattering way.”

“I know, and I know you’re not that kind of person. That’s why I’m annoyed with myself who can’t come to like your compliment.”

Hwaya put down her teacup as she spoke bitterly. Brightman really was hated... Was that part of his plan? Whether positively or negatively, he was making her think about him a lot... No, not even the [Divine Capturer](#) would think of such a method.

The World God Only Knows reference

I put away my useless thoughts and returned to the main subject.

“Then we should get started. How to check the amount of mana you have available and...”

“Wait, before that, we need to talk about something else.”

“Ah.”

She was right, there was something I had to explain to her first. With a bitter smile, I scratched my head. I closed my eyes and checked if there were any other presences nearby. I didn't think anyone would be hiding and did it as a precaution... But I couldn't help but ask Hwaya curiously.

“Hwaya, is anyone else living here with you?”

“What? No.”

“Really? That's weird, I can feel traces of someone that's not you... Maybe it's the people who lent you this place?”

“Maybe? It hasn't been that long since I rented it. I'll check later just in case.”

Although I wasn't fully satisfied, it was true that we were the only ones in this house, for now. I took in a breath... and took off my mask.

“Ah.”

Hwaya quietly stared at my face. As it was a bit embarrassing to continue staring at her face, I turned my gaze away slightly. Soon, she nodded her head.

“You’re much more handsome than I imagined. Just my type.”

“Thanks for the blatant compliment.”

“As I thought, you have black hair and black eyes.”

“I’m Korean after all.”

“Mm, I had considered the possibility that you weren’t Korean.”

“Of course I am... By the way, my real name is Kang Shin.”

“So your last name is Kang... Eh?”

She tilted her head, and I told her the truth.

“Kang Yungoong-ssi is my father.”

“You scammer!”

“Hahaha.”

“Uuuu, you lied to me so easily. I can’t believe you!”

“Sorry, that’s why I’m telling you now. It wasn’t easy, you know.”

“What, so you want me to be happy about it? Like you acknowledged me?”

“No... Sorry.”

Hwaya complained for a little while longer, then seemingly calmed down. Ah, wait, nevermind. She placed her teacup on her plate so angrily that I almost thought the plate would break.

“I saw the number of dungeon explorers on Earth increased to six. Did you do that too?”

“Yeah, a friend of mine is an Awakened. Don’t worry, that person is trustworthy and talented, worthy of being an explorer.”

“Uu, so three out of the six are already... No, but considering your personality...”

I knew what she wanted to say.

“I don’t plan on making an organization like you. It’s just my friend and father. Not to mention, you could make someone an explorer if you wanted to.”

“That’s true, but... Can I trust you?”



“Why would I lie?”

“Haa, I feel like I learned too many things just now. My head feels like it might burst.”

“Don’t take it too seriously. My father made me an explorer, I hid my identity in Earth’s dungeon explorer communication channel, and I made a friend I trusted into a dungeon explorer. There’s nothing more to it. I’m also revealing my identity to someone I can trust.”

“It’s too hard to accept it so simply.”

Hwaya put her head in her hands and looked like she was agonizing over something. Then, with a tired voice, she spoke.

“Whatever, I’ll trust you.”

“Thanks.”

“Quiet! You made me doubt someone I acknowledged as a friend even for a moment. That’s a very annoying and sad thing for me. You’ll have to make it up to me properly.”

“How?”

“You said you would teach me! Before I master it, you’d better

make time to teach me every night. Got it? This is your punishment! ... But I'll at least serve you milk tea when you come."

Never in my life did I receive such a cute punishment. I grinned and nodded my head.

"Yeah, got it."

"... Why are you smiling? It makes you look sly."

"It's nothing. I'm just happy I got to know a surprising side of my friend."

"Uuuuk...!"

Hwaya seemed to be embarrassed by my words, as she threw the teakettle at me. It seemed I would need to wait a bit more before I could start teaching her.

\*

From the 38th floor on, ghost knights appeared. If ghosts were the apparitions of ordinary people, ghost knights were the apparitions of knights riding on their ghost horses. Watching them charge at me on their ghost horses was quite a spectacle.

[Kill the human!]

[Living beings, taste the wrath of the dead!]

“Like I care, move!”

More importantly, it was much easier to break through than the previous floors.

“Ruyue, run!”

[Aoooooooooooo!]

As Ruyue ran crazily, the wall of ghosts to my left and right were pushed back at an incredible speed. Meanwhile, I only looked forward as I swung my spear. Although there were also ghosts, because their numbers were low, I was perfectly fine just defending myself while running forward. Ghost knights weren't my opponents. I was happy that clearing the dungeon floors became easy again. While Ruyue ran carrying me on her back, Peika watched out for the ghosts' soul arrows. Compared to the 36th and 37th floor, this floor matched my style much more.

[Kuaaaaaaa! Kill that rat! Stab your swords in his neck!]

[As knights, we'll recover our besmirched honor!]

“Come at me! Get in line!”

Cutting past the ghost knights as I charged onward mindlessly, I

managed to break through the 38th floor in five hours, half the time it took me to clear the 36th floor.

[You became level 39.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

“Perfect timing.”

Watching me gasping for breath, Lin threw something at me apathetically. I caught it and confirmed what it was. It was an earring, only one of what usually came in a pair. With two oval gems radiating a glowing gold, the beautiful craftsmanship made it more suitable for a woman than a man. I stared at it blankly for a while, then asked Lin.

“Lin, this is?”

“See for yourself.”

[Golden Teardrop (Unique)]

Durability – 90/90

Equipment Limit – One Who Defeated the Blood Succubus

Options – Intelligence +5, Magic +5, Charm +15

Skill – Succubus' Pupil (Passive): Wearing the earring amplifies your charm. You can resist mental status effects more easily, and there is a small chance it can reflect the status effect onto the enemy.]

“Wow... This really is an amazing item!”

“Is it?”

With that, Lin put out his hand. As promised, I gave him 100,000 gold. It was my turn now!

“So Lin, shouldn't you start making my other equipment? My weapon and the like.”

“Once you break through the 40th floor, I'll do it without you having to nag me! Don't make me remember such painful truths when I'm collecting money!”

“Lin, you should really be more honest. You already know I'll break through the 40th floor.”

“You...!”

Lin shook in rage while holding the bag of gold. It was only then that the emptiness I was feeling seemed to be filled. I couldn't help but let out a refreshing smile. Then, I equipped the Golden Teardrop. Since I was already equipping the Power Earring and Blood Succubus' Earring, I decided to say goodbye to the Power Earring, which only raised my strength by 2.

“Ek, disgusting.”

“You know, I agree.”

I didn't really care that the earrings were different. As they were both from the Blood Succubus, they went together quite well. The problem was that I was male, but with no other choice, I put on the earrings firmly.

When I arrived at the 39th floor, the ghosts had disappeared and were replaced by specters. Of course, most of the enemies were still ghost knights. Without a care in the world, I raised my spear. Specters were apparitions known for their ability to possess people. As such, they charged towards me the moment they caught sight of me.

[Kiikii, it's a human.]

[Control him.]

[Stabbing yourself with your own spear will feel special!]

I dematerialized Ruyue and infused her into my armor. Now, Peika was in my spear and Ruyue was in my armor. What would happen if specters tried to possess my spear or armor?

[Ugyaaaaaaaa!]

[Gyak! Cold! It's too cold, I can't move!]

They were electrocuted or frozen by themselves.

[Uwaaak, an Elementalist!]

[Elementalist!]

[Run!]

When all the spectres were chased away, the ghost knights that were charging stopped in their tracks. With a smirk, I raised my spear. They were slowly backing off. Of course, I didn't just leave them be.

\*

[You became level 40! You obtained the qualification to challenge the Floor Master!]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

“You really are fast. You seemed to be having trouble yesterday.”

“Compared to the 36th and 37th floor, the last two floors were a piece of cake. I was nervous for nothing.”

“I feel stupid just talking to you now. Hurry up and go to the 40th floor. Then die and come back a week later.”

“You really are blunt about it now...”

Even as I was dumbfounded, I made sure to buy plenty of Holy Water from Lin. I didn't know the identity of the 40th Floor Master, but he was sure to be some sort of ghost. With Holy Water, I would have a much better chance!

“Wish me luck, Lin, so that I can get the dragon leather cape!”

“Screw off!”

Yep, angry Lin was the best! Giving him a thumbs up, I climbed to the 40th floor. As the 40th floor wasn't any different in structure or the type of monsters that appeared, I got to the end without much trouble. When I was in front of the Floor Master room's unique black door, it was four in the morning. Since breakfast was at seven, I would be able to sleep for about two hours after defeating the boss once.



“Good...”

Nobody had taken the 40th floor boss' 'first' achievement. There was sure to be a reason that no one had succeeded the 40th Floor Master's first achievement, even though the 25th through 35th first achievements were accomplished. First, I applied an ample amount of Holy Water onto my weapons.

“Huu... I can do it!”

I had paid Loretta 50,000 gold for this info. I couldn't screw up here after doing so well until now! After taking in a deep breath, I opened the door with my Black Earthen Spear in hand.

“Fight me... Eh?”

What was beyond the door was a dreary land that seemed to have been taken out of hell. There were a countless number of ghosts and specters, and also ghost knights that were ready to charge.

Floating above them was an existence wearing a worn down cloak and pointing a pitch black scythe at my direction.

[Kikikik... It seems I will have to guide another dead soul.]

1. The World God Only Knows reference ↩

## Chapter 92. Crimson Roar (4)

---

“I can see why no one has cleared it solo on their first try...”

I smirked. Just look at that, there must be at least 500 of them. While climbing the dungeon, if there was one thing I understood, it was that no matter how many opponents I was up against, there was a limit to the number of attacks I would have to defend against. The only difference was how many times I would have to repeat defending, attacking, defending, attacking. Furthermore, I had just run past a pathway full of monsters like them. Besides the scythe holding reaper, there was nothing that could make me nervous.

I swung my spear once and fixed my grip on it. Then, I pointed it forward.

“Come!”

[You used Provoke. All enemies will attack you with strong hostility!]

[Suppress the living. Give pain to the explorer who ridicules death!]

[Kikikiki!]

[Kill him, kill him!]

[Take his soul and possess his body!]

The monsters rushed toward me like a tsunami. After taking in a deep breath, I patted Ruyue's back. It was the signal telling her to run.

[Auuu, pat me more.]

“Later. For now, run!”

[Auuuuuuuu!]

Ruyue kicked off the ground. First, I needed to lower their numbers in one go. I raised my spear and thrust forward, using Elemental Tempest. After the skill had reached mid-rank, more elementals began to gather, truly making me look like I was wielding a storm.

[Wheeeeeee!]

[Spin spin~~~!]

[Kuhaha, I've been waiting for this moment!]

Ignoring the elementals' voices, I shot it forward. In an instant,

my Elemental Tempest swept through over a hundred apparitions, mostly consisting of the ghost knights that had been standing in the front. I took out a high-rank Mana Potion and put it in my mouth. Then, I held the spear like a baseball bat.

“Elemental Blade!”

[Whee, roller coaster!]

[Let’s go, let’s go!]

[Eh? W-Wait! Not this one!]

[Wheeee!]

The moment I yelled out, my spear blade extended to 6 meters and began to radiate rainbow light. I swung the spear at the incoming apparitions. With most of the ghost knights swept away in the Elemental Tempest, the comparatively weaker ghosts and specters couldn’t withstand the elemental explosions and fell.

B-B-Boom!

[Kuk!]

[You, Elementalist!]

[Die, die apparitions!]

[Ueeeeek, I'm never getting on this one again!]

[Whee!]

The ghosts' death throes rang out along with elementals' cheers. However, in an instant, the apparitions split through the middle and something swept over me. When Ruyue quickly dodged, the ground behind me was marked with deep furrows as an explosive sound rang out.

[Don't uselessly die. I may need you all for other purposes.]

[Kyak! The reaper cometh!]

[The Grim Reaper has drawn his scythe.]

He would need them for other purposes...? The reaper swung his huge death scythe, sending a blade wave forward. I dodged his attack, but did not attack him, as I was worried about what he said. Instead, I used Tempest to attack the apparitions again.

[Kuaaak!]

[That bastard is shooting out storms!]

[Tsk, if that's what you want, then...!]

As I thought! As if to fold space, the reaper's body flew toward me stealthily and smoothly. His movements were unusual, as if I was watching an old horror movie. Regardless, the result was terrifying. A large scythe big enough to cover my entire view flew as if to cut off my head. I clenched my teeth and poured out a vast amount of mana into the spear where Peika was infused, raising it up and blocking the Grim Reaper's scythe.

[Strong!]

“Kuk!”

Something popped out from his stomach. Frightened, I hurriedly jumped and dodged it. Puk! When I heard the sound and looked back at the position I was in, I saw a small scythe. Shooting out a scythe from your stomach, what the hell are your internal organs made out of!? Unfortunately, I didn't have the time to dwell on such thoughts. He had shot out another blade wave. Dodging his attack again, I attacked the nearby ghosts with Thunder Arrow.

[Ek, he must think we are easy prey!]

[Show him it's not true!]

[I said, you guys stay still!]

[We're still going to die! Sob, why must I worry about dying even

after dying?]

When the apparitions flew towards me, the reaper stopped throwing his blade waves. As I thought, he didn't want the apparitions to die! Using Tempests, I took care of the apparitions. Then...

[Kuaaaaaaaa! Feel death! Death Roar!]

[Grim Reaper uses Death Roar! The attack power of all undead is doubled. The defense of all living beings is halved!]

[You resisted the status effect. The status effect has been nullified.]

Good, I was getting my money's worth from the item! Confirming that the reaper's skill had not affected me, I raised my head. Excited about having their attack power doubled, the ghost knights were charging at me in a line. Facing them, I screamed.

“Kiaaaaaaaaaak!”

[You used Vengeful Spirit's Wail. Most enemies become confused and feared!]



Eh? Although I hadn't expected much, most of the ghost knights charging my way fell and began to fight each other. Why? This skill used to only work on weak monsters with low intelligence... Then, I remembered something. Magic, charm, and intelligence were important in protecting my mind. In that case, they most likely helped in my mental attacks as well! Although I thought it was likely, I couldn't brood over it for very long. The reaper was swinging his scythe in front of me.

“Kuk, you're fast!”

[I shall take your head!]

From the reaper's deep voice, I felt a chilling sense of danger. Hugging Ruyue, I immediately used Talaria and flew into the air. Before I fully flew up, something had ripped my boots. Looking down, I couldn't help but shiver at the horrifying sight. Countless black hands had come out of the ground, trying to grab onto me. This was dangerous. If I was caught, they looked like they would drag me into the end of hell. The damage I'd take aside, it looked intimidating.

[Yay! Shin hugged me!]

[Master is feeling heavy, so hurry up and dematerialize!]

Ruyue dematerialized and sat on my head. Gritting my teeth, I shouted at the reaper.

“You son of a bitch, you said you’d take my head!”

[The one that gets tricked is the idiot.]

The reaper appeared in front of me again, but with Talaria, I did not lose to him in speed. Dodging his scythe just barely by falling back, I activated Divine Speed, poured white light into my Black Earthen Spear, and threw it at him.

“Die!”

[Kuk!]

I never missed my attack after using Divine Speed! After being hit by my Heroic Strike, the reaper flew back with his eyes opened wide. Seeing the Black Earthen Spear that transformed into white lightning sending the reaper’s large body flying dozens of meters, I clenched my fists and began to sweep through the apparitions again.

[You bastard, are you treating us like dust!?!]

[Make that bastard regret it!]

[But I feel like we’ll regret it more!]

[...]

“Peika, come back and help me clean them up!”

[Okay!]

Although I wanted to quickly take care of the trash mobs and focus on the reaper, he flew towards me before I could even kill a hundred ghosts. He took out the Black Earthen Spear stuck in his chest, then violently snapped it in half in front of me. Although the blade grew dull occasionally, the spear handle had never once broken, but he had done it!

“You son of a bitch! Do you know how precious that is!?”

[Kuha!]

Without offering me any excuses, he shot blade waves toward me again. If I were hit by that ominous black pulsation, I didn't think it would end with just receiving damage.

“Kuk!”

Dodging his attack, I took out the Silver Spear and aimed it at him. I saw the two halves of my Black Earthen Spear falling. Was that repairable? It should be, right? The water in my eyes was sweat, not tears! I didn't think I threw it for no reason either. Even so, I decided to utterly destroy that bastard. I raised my spear, and aimed it at him.

Then I dropped to the ground abruptly. It was truly a sudden

drop.

[How did you know!?!]

Above me, the reaper's shout rang out. I raised my head and confirmed that he was standing in the place I was just in. Damn, just how many skills did he have!?

"I won't tell you, you bast... ut!"

Again! When I quickly flew away, the trajectory of the reaper's large black scythe cut through the air. I felt goosebumps on my back. I truly couldn't sense anything!

[How can you dodge my attacks!?!]

"It's instinct, bitch!"

Gritting my teeth, I extended my spear blade using Elemental Blade and slashed at him. It seemed he was specialized for attacks, but had a weaker defense compared to normal Floor Masters, as my Elemental Blade dealt noticeable damage to him. I continued pushing at him to prevent him from teleporting to my back again. Elemental power constantly exploded and annoyed him. The worn-down cloth he was wearing began to tear slowly. The reaper screamed.

[Kiaaaaaaa!]

“Kuk!?”

Is it that attack again!? Black hands shot out from my surroundings toward me. Flying into the air, I looked at the black hands that had covered half of the entire ground, and murmured with an astonished face.

“Crazy... Just how much mana does that bastard have!?”

[Die!]

“Kik.”

As I thought, if I stayed here dumbfounded, he would appear behind me again. As I had already seen him do it twice, I recognized when he would use that move and how he would strike his scythe. Lightly moving to the side, I dodged his scythe. Although his face was empty under his hood, I could sense his astonishment as black light fluctuated. I then grabbed his scythe, which had remained in the position he had struck down in.

“Dark Thunder Explosion!”

I considered using White Lightning Consecutive Strike, but that skill was most effective when my feet were on the ground. Not to mention, I was running low on mana. The Mana Potion’s cooldown time had not ended yet either. As such, I chose to use Dark Thunder Explosion.

Although I was on the lookout for scythes flying out of its stomach, but after being hit by Dark Thunder Explosion's initial lightning bolt, he had become paralyzed and was unable to attack. Heh. The corners of my mouth went up in a smile.

In the air, a festival of lightning occurred.

[Critical Hit!]

[Kuaaaaaaak!]

Along with the reaper's scream, the black hands that had sprouted up from the ground trembled and elongated, but I, their target, was already in the air with the reaper. This. How was I supposed to defeat him without Talaria? It seemed I would need to do some research for a while.

While I was thinking rather leisurely, the reaper danced in the air, continuously being struck by black lightning bolts. This skill also seemed stronger than the first time I used it. Even though it didn't use my mana, it had grown stronger according to my magic stat. Did the skills work with a different principle? It could also be because the ability of my contracted lightning elemental, Peika, increased.

When the explosion ended, I poured mana into my Silver Spear and swung it at him. After being hit, the Grim Reaper helplessly

flew through the air. The black hands on the ground had already disappeared. I landed along with him and took care of the leftover ghosts. Although I allowed myself to be hit by their soul arrows while I was fighting the reaper, I couldn't let a boulder be pierced by raindrops.

[Kukuku... I acknowledge you.]

“Don't. Just die.”

The cooldown time ended and I could drink a Mana Potion again. Putting a Mana Potion worth 15 million won in my mouth, I lowered my body. Ruyue materialized on her own and let me ride on her back. Compared to when he first appeared, the reaper was tattered. He raised his scythe.

Then, he slashed the ghosts that had survived until now.

[Grim Reaper uses 'Soul Eater'! He recovers 1% HP and MP for each soul he cuts with his scythe!]

[Kii, I'm finally free!]

[My long journey has finally come to an end.]

“As I thought, that's what it was.”

Although I diligently killed the ghosts, there were still about 200 ghosts left. I started killing the ghosts before the reaper could cut them, but he had almost fully recovered.

[Kuhuhu, despair, Hero. Despair suits you more than hope.]

“Tempest!”

[No matter how much you struggle, you cannot defeat me.]

“Elemental Blade!”

[You!?!]

While the reaper was blabbering on about something, I managed to take care of all the ghosts. I looked around the field, but could not spot any ghosts or specters. At the same time, however, Talaria had ended, meaning I could not fly into the air anymore. The reaper seemed to have realized this, as he swung his scythe and sneered.

[You can't run like a rat anymore.]

“You can't recover anymore either.”

Spinning my spear, I reviewed his skills one by one. Blade wave, shooting small scythes out of his stomach, suddenly appearing



behind me and swinging his scythe, and the black hands that shot up from the ground. Although I could block the first three, how was I supposed to block the black hands? After thinking for a bit, I made my decision.

“I’ll just have to endure it with Dragon Skin.”

It’s his cheaty skill that was at fault! It wasn’t my fault! I’d think of a solution after I beat him once, so it was fine! Making rather disappointing excuses to myself, I stepped forward.

“Let’s go!”

## Chapter 93. Crimson Roar (5)

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Although it was bit embarrassing to say myself, I was a genius when it came to fighting. Simply put, I never fell for the same attack again.

No matter how accomplished a martial artist was, there would be a limit to the techniques he used. All humans had set patterns to their movements, and once I saw them with my eyes and experienced them with my body, it wasn't too difficult to comprehend the movements and counterattack. However, it seemed other people didn't think like me. Even father made a surprised expression when I told him about it.

Just like how smart students could solve application problems with one equation, once I saw and experienced a technique, I could understand and counterattack, no matter how the technique was utilized. My body was remembering it.

It was a different story if I was too slow to dodge the enemy's attack even after reading its trajectory, but otherwise, I could deal with it easily. This was the same for Floor Master battles. Their skills had a pattern to them that was much clearer than human movements. Once I experienced it a single time, it would be weird if it hit me the second time.

That said, it wasn't always possible to dodge them. Floor Masters' skills were all difficult, if not impossible, to avoid.

[Die!]

“Dragon Skin!”

I used Dragon Skin, shouting at the top of my voice. Ignoring the black hands that shot up from the ground, I shot my Elemental Blade at the Grim Reaper. Before he was hit by the Elemental Blade, Grim Reaper teleported behind me. I, of course, read his movements.

“Throw!”

[Kuk!]

I grabbed him and threw him on the ground, as if I was waiting for him to appear behind me. Peika and Ruyue floated in the air and focused on the reaper with their elemental magic without me having to order them. Meanwhile, the black hands flailed and tried to pull me underground. However, because my body was strengthened by Dragon Skin, the hands snapped while trying to pull on me. Seeing it, a thought flashed across my mind.

“Ruyue, come into my armor!”

[Okay!]

Ruyue, who was attacking the reaper with Peika, came into my armor. At the same time, I imbued mana into my armor and strengthened it. Then, as I thought, the black hands that touched the armor froze and began to snap. I had found a way to stop the

black hands without using Dragon Skin! A gleam of success had flashed in my Grim Reaper fight strategy.

“Whew, you’re screwed now, reaper.”

[Reaper’s Scythe!]

The moment I declared confidently, a large shadow dropped down from above my head. As my body was bent from throwing the reaper on the ground, I dodged the attack by rolling. However, I was unable to fully dodge his attack and the shadow still struck my helmet, cutting it up perfectly. I was even under Dragon Skin’s effect! With my bare face showing, I gritted my teeth.

“You son of a bitch, just how many skills do you have hidden!?”

[Reaper’s Scythe!]

Since using his skills one by one didn’t seem to work, the Reaper seemed to have decided to use all his skills at once. The black hands pulled on me, the large shadow scythe dropped from sky, and a blade wave came flying my way. As I threw him down once, the reaper didn’t teleport behind me again and only threw out long-ranged attacks from a distance. He really was shrewd. I felt like I was fighting a cunning human.

“Peika!”

[I’m ready!]

If that's your plan, I'll take on that challenge for a battle of attrition! I put another Mana Potion in my mouth and glared at the Grim Reaper swinging his scythe from a distance. You don't have Mana Potions anymore, but I do!

First, I ignored the black hands, which could not affect me by much, and focused on dodging the shadow scythes and blade waves. At the same time, I left Peika, who was free, to attack the reaper.

I could stick close to the 35th Floor Master, Dullahan, and have a fierce close-range fight, but the 40th Floor Master, Grim Reaper, was completely different than Dullahan. They were polar opposites. One thing I could be sure of was that everyone would choose to fight Dullahan over the Grim Reaper. Without my Elementalist abilities, it would really be impossible to defeat the Grim Reaper alone.

[You won't be able to defeat me, Hero!]

"If you're so confident, why don't you come fight me up close?"

[Reaper's Scythe!]

'Hey, don't attack just because you don't know what to say!' I frantically dodged his attack. Peika also attacked him whenever there was an opening.

Before I noticed it, the black hands were gone. The shadow scythes were also coming less frequently. Although the reaper was flying around quickly, swinging his scythe at me, I realized he had run out of mana.

“Ruyue, go help Peika now.”

[Okay!]

Once I deactivated Spirit Aura and Ruyue joined Peika to attack, it became more difficult for the reaper to dodge their attacks. Using the gap where the shadow scythe wasn't dropping down on me, I let the reaper's blade wave fly past my shoulder and charged toward him. My Silver Spear shone with a light full of vengeance.

“Die!”

[As if!]

The reaper teleported backwards consecutively. However, the moment his teleportation stopped, Ruyue restrained the reaper's movements with her ice shackles. He could have normally broken Ruyue's shackles easily, but he was currently out of mana. He didn't have the strength to escape a mid-rank elemental's restraint.

As he was about to swing his scythe, Ruyue's shackles crept up to his arms and bound them in place. Although they wouldn't be able to hold him for long, they were doing their job for now.

While I was running toward him, Peika naturally flew toward me and infused herself in my spear. I poured the momentum from my charge into the tip of my spear and thrust forward.

“Heroic Strike!”

[Critical Hit!]

[Kuak!]

The reaper coughed out what looked like a black shadow from his mouth. It seemed similar to blood, but I dodged it just in case. When the shadow hit the ground, it dissolved the ground. Although I had expected it somewhat, his insides were full of poison.

When I looked away thinking I really couldn't let my guard down until the end, a black shadow scythe shot out from inside the reaper's hood. He still had mana left over!

[This is the end!]

“Divine Speed!”

‘Sorry, but I knew you were hiding mana the moment you let the

shackles capture you so easily!’ Confirming that he had used his final move, I dodged the black scythe swinging down at me, and ran behind him. At the same time Divine Speed ran out, I saw the shadow scythe disappearing into the air.

[Kuk, you slippery worm!]

“Be happy, reaper.”

I said as I considered which area in his back he would receive the most pain from.

“Today, you’ll be the first reaper to be killed by a slippery worm.”

[You became level 41. You obtained the qualification to advance to the 41st floor.]

[You obtained 5 bonus stats.]

[You became Silver Rank 3.]

[You can now visit the Residential Area’s recreational area! Ask the Residential Area administrators for more info!]

[Amazing! You are the first in First Dungeon’s history to succeed in soloing the Grim Reaper on the first try! The



dungeon will remember you as a Great Explorer. You obtained 2 skill points as a reward. You obtained a life-time free voucher for ‘Resting Place of Angels!’ Current skill points: 14]

[Quest Success! You succeeded in completing draconian Lin’s conditions within three months. Even while he grits his teeth, Lin will grant you the promised equipment. You obtained 1 skill point as reward. Current skill points: 15]

[You obtained the title, ‘Grim Reaper Master.’ All stats increase by 2. This effect will apply even if the title is not equipped.]

[You defeated the Grim Reaper alone. You obtained the special reward, ‘Grim Reaper’s Robe.’]

[You obtained 150,000 gold.]

[You received the only reward left hidden for the First Explorer. Congratulations! Your luck stat increases by 1.]

[Secret. Soul Guard Magic Book]

“Whoo.”

I murmured in an unexcited voice. I had no energy left in me. My helmet had been cut in half and my Black Earthen Spear broke. My armor was in tatters from the reaper’s black hands and his blade waves, and blood was flowing through its gaps. My hair was a mess

and I was muddy from rolling on the ground.

I hadn't been in such a mess since the days when I fought the Orc Lord. Although I wanted to collapse on the ground, it was muddy. I prevented myself from fainting using my extraordinary willpower and picked up my Black Earthen Spear from the ground. It was quite cleanly broken.

[Shin was cool! Super cool!]

[Master is amazing.]

“Come here. You guys worked hard too.”

My elementals flew toward me like puppies. Hugging both of them in my embrace, I asked message noona to bring up the message log. When I read the part about recreational area, I tilted my head.

“I haven't heard about this before... I can get there from the Residential Area? Is it an upgraded version of the Residential Area?”

Although I wasn't sure, I felt it had something to do with the Resting Place of Angels life-time free voucher I got as a reward for completing the achievement. I would find out once I got there.

I had successfully obtained the Grim Reaper Master title and the secret reward: Soul Guard. When I chose it from the reward list, a

magic book appeared and flew inside me.

[You learned the skill Soul Guard (Passive). Through deep spiritual meditation, you grow your soul's strength, defending against mental status effects and advancing the league of your existence. The effect will increase along with skill level.]

“It’s like Lin said.”

I really got a skill that protected against mental status effects. I instinctively felt that there was more that this skill was hiding. I would find out as I advanced. For now, I wanted to get my quest reward and go to sleep.

“... Kuk.”

Lin was smoking with his feet on the Floor Shop desk. After seeing me, he smirked.

“You’re a mess.”

“I thought I’d die. It was hard.”

“But you managed to succeed. On your first try, alone.”

“Well... Yeah.”

“Huuu...”

Lin puffed out a cloud of smoke. He then set the entire cigarette on fire, making it disappear without even leaving behind ashes. Then, he threw something at me. When I received it hurriedly, it was a thin bracelet made out of reddish metal. Although it looked simple, its beautiful texture was captivating.

I asked Lin.

“What’s this?”

“Your reward. I made it while you weren’t here.”

“... I didn’t think Lin would make do with just a bracelet.”

“I’ll teach you how to activate it.”

Lin got up from his seat and made a serious expression. It was like the expression of a great sage passing on his knowledge of ancient magic to his successor.

“First, wear it.”

“Okay... There.”

“Alright, put the arm without the bracelet forward, then make it touch your collar bone. Then, raise the arm with the bracelet up into the sky—”

“Oh!”

Ignoring Lin’s obvious bait, I poured mana into the bracelet. In an instant, the bracelet radiated a strong light. The armor I was wearing disappeared and something else wrapped around my body.

In less than 0.1 second, I was wearing a different set of armor than before. Red, sharp, and metallic scales that looked like a red dragon’s scales were covering my body. The gauntlet was easy to move in, and the armor and boots were incredibly light. The helmet fit perfectly as well. When I glanced behind me, a red leather cape was fluttering without any wind blowing. It was super cool!

“So, Lin. I’m not sure how this works, so can you demonstrate what you said?”

“You little... Just take the spear.”

Lin spoke with bitterness and threw a red metallic spear at me. Catching the spear, I thought Lin was quite funny.

[You unequipped Dullahan Set. Your strength and

constitution decrease by 17.]

[You unequipped Black Earthen Spear. Your strength decreases by 5 and your dexterity decreases by 10.]

[You equipped Crimson Dragon Scale Armor Set. It becomes bound to you. All stats increase by 10. Your strength and constitution increase by an additional 10 points. The chances of receiving a critical hit decreases greatly, and you return a portion of the damage you receive to your enemy. The effects of all charge type skills are increased by 60%.]

[You equipped Red Dragon Felixes' Cape. It becomes bound to you. Your dexterity, magic, and charm increase by 15. You become immune to all temperature-based status effects. Three times per day, it protects its master from unforeseen attacks.]

[You equipped Crimson Gluttony Spear. It becomes bound to you. Your strength increases by 30. Fire damage is added to all basic attacks and you have a high chance to burn the enemy. It evolves by consuming weapon-type items.]

[While equipping Crimson Dragon Scale Armor Set, you can use 'Crimson Roar' once per day. Crimson Roar turns the air it reaches into blazing flames that attacks the enemies. As it burns everything other than its user, it must be used with precaution.]

“This is...”

Just by changing my equipment, I felt a sense of omnipotence, like nothing was impossible. The stat bonuses I gained from Black Earthen Spear and Dullahan Set was 49 points. Even if I excluded the charm and luck stat bonuses, the stat bonuses I gained now was 130! The effect was worth over 15 levels of growth! Of course, with this much stat increase, the ‘update’ time would also be incredibly long.

Even knowing that, my body was itching from the excitement! My body that was exhausted and ready to faint seemed to want to go on a rampage. Reaper? With this much stat increase, the amount of damage I could do to the reaper would need to be counted with a different unit!

“Once it’s bound to you, you’ll receive the stat bonuses just by having the bracelet equipped. Ah, but you can’t use Crimson Roar with the armor unequipped, so keep that in mind.”

“Thanks, Lin!”

“If you thank me now... my insides are going to flip, so don’t...!”

The equipment I received were all breathtaking. Although I knew I shouldn’t just rely on my equipment, a warrior couldn’t help but be happy when he received such good equipment.

“Also, that spear can absorb weapons.”

“Absorb? What happens when it absorbs them?”

“You’ll find out once you absorb enough. Why don’t you try it out?”

I immediately thought about my halved Black Earthen Spear. When I brought it up to the Gluttony Spear, the Black Earthen Spear disappeared surprisingly. At the same time, a message rang out.

[Crimson Gluttony Spear absorbed Black Earthen Spear.  
Growth: 1%]

“1 percent!? It has to eat a hundred more?”

“That’s a lot. It must have been a pretty good weapon.”

I learned a valuable lesson. That I should not worry about the weapon’s growth for a while.

In any case, since I now had new equipment and a weapon, I had to take them out for a test. Forgetting all about sleep, I shouted.

“Lin, I’ll come back after doing another boss fight!”

“Yeah, yeah, go die.”



Taking Lin's words as a joke, I went to fight the boss again.

I died. Just like that, I became unable to grind the boss for a week.

Once I was chased out to the Residential Area, I calmly assessed what had happened. The stat update had only just begun, and I hadn't gotten strong enough to overwhelm the Grim Reaper. Although I said I felt energetic, my body was undoubtedly exhausted. Without being able to draw out my full ability, I got killed. Although I normally would have been able to think this far, I had lost my reason as the equipment I earned were too good. I learned the lesson that I shouldn't act based on excitement. One week was the price I would have to pay.

Life really was a rollercoaster.

## Chapter 94. Granting Freedom (1)

---

As an S-ranker who had come to Windermere because of Hwaya's request for help, I was treated very well.

Because a Field Dungeon appeared, Britain had built a building for ability users at Windermere, where modern buildings had traditionally been avoided. Although it was an eyesore outside, the view from the inside was truly marvelous. It was especially so the higher you went in the building. Naturally, higher ranked ability users were situated on higher floors.

I received a room on the same floor as Paul and Mike from Hwaya's team. It was the second highest floor of the building, as the entire floor above mine was given to Joshua Brightman. For meals, I could eat at the hotel restaurant or order room service. After being kicked out of the dungeon, I came back to the hotel room from my mansion in the Residential Area. After a short nap, I chose to go to the restaurant. Paul and Mike both welcomed another guy joining Hwaya's team, and wanted to talk to me as we ate.

"So T.K., what country are you from?"

"Like I said, don't call me T.K... and it's a secret, of course."

"Your guard is high, I see. I think you're Korean though."

"Right. Mastiford always said her mother wanted her son-in-law to be Korean."

“Huu...”

Letting out a short sigh, I rolled a piece of toast and threw it into my mouth.

“Nom nom... I’d like it if you guys didn’t make our relationship to be like that. I don’t really care, but Hwaya would probably be angry.”

“Right. She would hate it if others forced her into a relationship without her knowledge.”

A voice that wasn’t mine, Paul’s, nor Mike’s rang out. I drank my red tea.

“Haa... It’s sweet.”

“Of course, with how much sugar you put in... You know this is red tea, not milk tea, T.K.”

“Did you perhaps not hear me?”

As Mike and I were talking to each other, the voice rang out again. Huu. I sighed and turned my head in the direction the voice came from. I saw a tall man standing there in a suit. He had a large body, halfway between the old and current me, and had short silver hair that was combed over with pomade. The two blue eyes

on his angled face seemed to be glaring at me for some reason. Although I had heard he was in his late thirties, he seemed like he was in his twenties. In any case, the strong spirit that could be felt from his entire body proved that he was another SS-ranker.

He extended his hand toward me.

“I’m Joshua Brightman. Nice to meet you.”

“Uh... Mm. I can’t say it’s nice to meet you, but hello. I’m Thunder Knight. Hwaya invited me here.”

When I grabbed his hand thinking, ‘This situation seems familiar,’ he really put all his strength into the grip like a scene from an old movie. For a moment, I seriously considered flipping him over, but I felt that reacting in such a way would be taking his bait, so I didn’t.

“I heard you’re an SS-ranker. You really are strong. With your grip being this strong in handshakes, it must be hard having a normal life. Looks like you need to practice controlling your strength a bit.”

“Ha! What an interesting fellow.”

“I don’t find you very interesting. You’ll need to practice joking too.”

I retorted as I wiped my hand with a towel after shaking his

hand. A young man behind Joshua Brightman became angry and stepped forward. He was blonde and had blue eyes just like Brightman. I instantly realized that he was Britain's last S-ranker.

“How impertinent, Asian.”

“If you want to call me impertinent, you shouldn't bother me when I'm eating and screw off, Westerner.”

I responded coldly and tapped the teacup I was drinking from. At the same time, Paul and Mike burst into laughter.

“He got you good there, Tommy! Yep, not even dogs would bother a man having his breakfast tea.”

“You should drink when you can these days. Eh, Tommy?”

“Don't call me Tommy!”

It seemed all the S-rankers were familiar with each other. Interpreting their conversation as such, I calmly drank my sweet tea. Mm, yep, I really did put too much sugar. Next time, I'd have to lower the amount to only 12 spoons.

Then, the restaurant door opened. Given that the entire restaurant got brighter, it was undoubtedly Hwaya.

“Shin, T.K.! I told you, we should eat toge... gek, Brightman...”

No, wait, is T.K. an actual name? Why is everyone saying it so naturally!? I said call me John Smith! As I murmured unhappily, I shook the teacup that was now empty. It seemed Hwaya didn't see it.

“Oh! You're beautiful as always, Miss Mastiford.”

“You're disgusting as always, Brightman. I'm here to talk to my comrades, so I'd like it if you can give us some space.”

“You're sharper than usual today. Is that because of this friend here?”

“I don't remember becoming your friend...”

I answered weakly and got up from my seat. After putting my teacup down on my plate with an audible sound, I continued.

“You're probably here because you were annoyed with me who's Hwaya's friend and getting in the way of your schemes, and that loyal dog is probably here so that you can test out my strength. Luckily, something annoying happened to me too yesterday, so I'd be happy to beat someone to a pulp, and, not to mention, Hwaya would probably burn up the entire building if she kept talking to you, and others would be annoyed with us if we kept taking up space, so why don't we take it outside?”

The restaurant became silent. Then, someone burst out into

laughter. It was Hwaya.

“Ahahahahaha! What’s that!? Do you think he’d really do that? Not even a third-rate villain from a movie would think like that!”

“I know, right, Hwaya? I was just saying it.”

I stared at Brightman as I said that. He smiled as if he found it amusing, and rubbed his chin with his hand wearing a white glove.

“You must be quite confident in your ability. Why don’t you be my opponent for a bit? For a morning exercise, of course.”

“An SS-ranker like you shouldn’t use your strength to bully weaker people. You must be joking.”

In truth, I wouldn’t be able to beat the current Brightman, not without revealing all my skills at least. The sheer amount of mana his body was naturally emitting was enough to intimidate ordinary people. His body clearly showed signs of regular training as well as that overwhelming amount of mana. I wouldn’t be able to inflict a fatal injury even if I used Heroic Strike. Of course, it would be my overwhelming win if I was just running without a direct confrontation. It was why I could be so cheeky.

“He’s right, Joshua. You don’t have to step in. I’ll crush that arrogant Asian’s mouth.”

Tommy stepped forward. Brightman pretended to be concerned

for a bit, then nodded his head. It was pretty clear that this was his intention from the start.

“My, if you’re that scared of sparring, there’s nothing I can do. But you should be careful, he’s a master of the sword.”

“Sniff sniff... What perfume do you use? ... It’s the same fragrance as the one I smelled in Hwaya’s house. Since there’s no way Hwaya invited you to her house, you must be using the same perfume as Hwaya.”

At my words, Brightman and even Hwaya froze. To be more concrete, the traces I felt in Hwaya’s house was the same as the one I felt from Brightman. However, it wasn’t Brightman. His ability wasn’t one that would allow him to hide somewhere stealthily. One of his subordinates, however, could have such an ability. Of course, I already knew the answer.

Thinking back to what I said yesterday, Hwaya seemed to have understood what I meant, and Brightman seemed to reach same conclusion. He frowned for an instant, but soon answered with a smile.

“Ha, that’s impossible. It must be because I hung around Mastiford too much recently.”

“That must be it, right? I didn’t really like the smell, so I told her to stop using it. If you were using the same perfume, I was going to tell you the same thing.”



“That’s... very presumptuous of you...”

This was enough of a warning. However, if the same thing happened again, I wouldn’t be able to do much about you, but I could certainly take care of your subordinate. Brightman glanced over my words with a snort, and I also grinned.

“Ah, also, you shouldn’t cling to her so much that her perfume would stain your clothes. As a man myself, it’s a bit sad watching another man going after a girl who clearly hates him.”

“It’s only a matter of time before she opens her heart up to me. It’s not something others should care about.”

“Brightman, that will never happen, so please screw off. You’re free to have your delusions, but as a friend, he has the right to care.”

“Oi, Asian. Are you going to just blabber on? Stop barking like a dog and follow me out.”

Tommy was calling me. I didn’t like fighting with words either. Because of my increased intelligence, I was uselessly talking more. I followed Tommy outside. It seemed people enjoyed watching a fight no matter what country they were from, as people followed us out, forming a circle around us.

[Shin, your ability is going to be shown for all these people to judge. Are you okay with that? If not, I can stop the fight. They’ll

find out how amazing you are from your results anyways.]

[Don't worry. With his strength, he won't be able to draw my real strength out.]

I responded to Hwaya's worried message and gave her a wink. She smiled in response. She really was pretty.

As I stood inside the ring made my spectators, I thought about how everything had turned out like I expected. Although it would be a performance, instilling my ability into their minds would help me in my time here. I hadn't fallen for Brightman's provocation without thinking.

First, I took out white work gloves from my inventory and wore them. Then, I summoned Peika and infused her into the work gloves. Seeing the sparks flicker from the work gloves, Hwaya opened her mouth as if to say something, but didn't.

Tommy took out a longsword that was apparently his beloved weapon, pointing it towards me. Ability users generally wore armor made out of monster remains, but he wasn't wearing anything.

"You're not wearing any armor. Will you be okay?"

"You should be worried for yourself."

Mm, I liked his confidence. I nodded my head and reached into

my pocket to take out a coin. Then, I realized I only had Korean won. Hwaya seemed to have read my mind as she took out a 10 won coin and threw it over. After catching it, I asked Tommy.

“Do you want me to do it, or you?”

“You can do it. We’ll start the moment it hits the ground.”

“Alright. Eit.”

I flicked the coin apathetically. The coin spun in the air. The moment it hit the ground...

He was right in front of me. He really was fast. It seemed his ability strengthened his speed the most. The sword he raised up let out a strong light from the black mana imbued in it. It fell directly on my head.

His technique wasn’t bad either. About mid-rank level 4? I reflected on my mistake, thinking that he was a fool with only his body strengthened by mana. When the opponent was vastly weaker than me, it was hard to assess his strength accurately.

No matter how fast he came at me, I would not be hit unless he struck me before I could respond. I thanked him inwardly for saving the trouble of having to run at him. I grabbed the arm he raised up with one hand and punched his stomach with my other hand. Sparks of lightning flashed and the clothes Tommy was wearing were burnt black.

“Kuk!”

When I used Divine Speed and sent a few punches in less than a second, there was no more strength in his arm. I first bent his arm and took away his longsword, throwing it away on the ground. Then, I jumped on top of him. Although all this took a while to describe, it had happened in exactly 1.7 seconds.

“Wa—”

“First, let’s hit you a bit.”

From that point, I punched his face for 37 seconds before he could finally shout the word ‘surrender.’

“Even with an A+-rank healer healing him, he won’t be able to fight for a week... Thunder Knight, that was too much.”

The five of us embarked on a battleship that was a modified cruise ship. It seemed the old and kind-hearted Madam Brown didn’t like that I beat up Tommy to such extent. Then, Hwaya, who had her arms stretched out to her side to enjoy the lake’s wind, answered in my place.

“But Madam Brown, you didn’t heal him.”

“Of course, I thought he should take a beating too.”

“Madam Brown is scary...”

“I was quite happy. As the only melee attacker out of Britain’s four S-rankers, he kept bragging about how he was the strongest.”

“Really, how did you overwhelm him by that much?”

As a melee range ability user like Tommy, Paul seemed to be curious how I could deal with Tommy so easily. I answered Paul’s question with a light laugh.

“When fighting monsters, things like strength and magic are important. But in a fight between two people, there’s something even more important. Technique.”

“Technique... I understand what you mean, but how? You’re an Awakened just like him.”

“I learned martial arts even before that. For about 13 years.”

“Ah, so that’s it.”

“Mm, I still can’t understand. Is how you move your body that important? I only block with my shield, so I’m not sure.”

“You should know the force is different depending on where on the shield you’re attacked. It’s like that.”

“Ah, now that you put it that way, I have a better idea.”

It seemed I could fit in better with this group after what happened this morning. I was quite content with it.

“But I’m worried about what Brightman will do from here on out.”

“He won’t stay still. Be careful, T.K.”

“No, he can’t harm me in the slightest.”

I announced.

“He isn’t stupid enough to make a move on me himself, and I’m not afraid of anyone other than Brightman himself.”

If I had revealed my ability, it could have been a bit more dangerous. After all, his influence was strong enough to reach Korea. Annoying things could happen if he found out. Of course, as I was hiding my identity right now and only working as an Awakened known as Thunder Knight, his influence was extremely limited in its reach. The best he could do was frame me for something I didn’t do to decrease my fame and area of activity.

For example, he could frame me for crimes like rape or murder. With the increased rate of crime from ability users, special ability

user units were created to deal with them. If he could frame me for a severe crime like rape or murder, it could be fatal. There could also be other ways to bother me. After all, money and political power were strong.

However.

“You can prevent that much, right, Hwaya?”

“Hmph, don’t underestimate an SS-ranker’s strength. The British government can’t ignore me. Even if I go around killing people, they’ll cover up my crimes.”

“Unfortunately, that applies to Brightman, too.”

“That’s true. So hurry and get stronger, so you can crush him, Shi... T.K.”

“It shouldn’t take long. Look forward to it.”

When I answered her and smiled, Hwaya stayed silent for a bit, then returned a smile back.

“Alright, I’ll look forward to it.”

The others watched our conversation from the sidelines and whispered.

“... They’re dating, right?”

“Sh, let’s just watch over them slowly.”

“I used to be like that with my wife too...”

These spectators weren’t just in Korea!

“Anyways, what have you been doing since a while ago, T.K.?”

Mike asked me. Looking at the knife I was sharpening with a whetstone, I replied.

“Hm? Oh, you’re asking why I’m sharpening a knife?”

“Oh! So you can wield knives too? That’s something to look forward to!”

“No... What is everything talking about?”

As I looked at the 8-meter long tuna breaching out of the water, I replied.

“Sashimi is best served fresh.”

“ ... ”



While everyone was silent from being touched, I hummed and aimed the sharpened knife at the tuna. Today's lunch would be a tuna sashimi special!

## Chapter 95. Granting Freedom (2)

---

A+-rank Field Dungeon, Graveyard Over the Lake. There were three types of monsters that appeared here. First were the fish-headed, human-legged monsters that climbed on top of boats and attacked with their sharp teeth, the fishmen. As the weakest group of monsters at Graveyard Over the Lake, they were the greatest in number. They swam freely in the lake, then suddenly jumped on top of boats and attacked the passengers. As melee attack monsters, they were also the monsters that annoyed Hwaya's party the most.

The second were the shark type monsters that resembled saw sharks, toothsaws. They had long upper jaw covered in saw-like teeth that seemed to be strengthened by mana as they vibrated like chain saws. These monsters didn't jump on top of boats like fishmen, but approached boats with chainsaw sounds and poked holes in them.

To prevent this, the cruise ship I was on was patched with the leather of the S-rank monster, wyvern. Even so, it couldn't last very long against the toothsaws' attacks. As such, we had to take care of them whenever we heard their chainsaw sounds. Although Hwaya's attribute wasn't the best for the dungeon, her SS-ranked flames could still burn their targets underwater. In other words, as long as they weren't left untouched as they attacked, they were easier to deal with than fishmen.

The third and last were the most precious and popular monsters, melting tunas! Why were they called melting tunas? Because they were so soft and delicious that they melted in our mouths! They were so delicious that they were called the blessing of

Windermere's dungeon! Even without Bluestones, these melting tunas were said to be sold for 150 million won.

“But you see, my magic roasts them instantly...”

“My magic is a bit slow to cast...”

“Useless people, ptui.”

“You want me to roast you instead?”

“Just wait there until my magic is finished.”

Oops, I accidentally said my thoughts out loud. Regardless, looking at the melting tuna that had jumped on top of our boat and splashed around, I asked the others.

“How do these things attack?”

“They shoot water from their mouths.”

As soon as Hwaya's words left her mouth, the melting tuna turned its head towards me and shot out a stream of water. Mike, who was ready, blocked it with a wall of water. A thundering roar that shouldn't be possible from the collision of water rang out. I first wore a raincoat for sanitary purposes, then charged at the melting tuna.

“Hand over your [otoro](#) and I’ll cook you with the least amount of pain... huk!”

The most expensive, fattiest, and most delicious part of a tuna.

“What’s wrong, T.K.?”

I ran behind the tuna to its blind spot and swung my knife. Seeing the knife break the moment it touched its scales, my eyes opened wide.

“The knife... won’t go in!”

“It’s an A+-rank monster. What did you expect, stupid?”

“Damn it!”

I wrapped my arms around the melting tuna’s gills. Although its constant struggling annoyed me, it couldn’t overpower my strength, which was boosted by various equipment. When I let lightning flow into its body through its gills, the melting tuna stopped its water attack and began coughing. Good, it was working! I raised the lightning output and strangled him harder. Every time sparks of lightning flickered from my arms, the melting tuna twitched, its resistance becoming weaker.

“So that’s Thunder Knight.”

“My image of him is being... broken.”

After wrestling with the melting tuna for a minute, I managed to kill it. However, looking at the smoked melting tuna, I realized I had made a fatal mistake.

“Oh no... I grilled it!”

“Ha, you’re no different than me, T.K.!”

Killed by a minute-long exposure to strong lightning, even the inside of the tuna had been grilled to perfection. Although I was glad everyone said it was tastier than Hwaya’s roasted version, I refused to give up. Damn, since I couldn’t just bring out my spear, there was only one thing I could do!

“I need to learn a sword technique and strengthen my knife with mana!”

“Are you crazy?”

Kitchen knives couldn’t penetrate melting tunas when they were alive or when they had just died. Knives only worked on them long after they died or when they were cooked to perfection! As such, I couldn’t fillet the melting tunas like I wanted. Chewing on its delicious gill (with its size, its gill was also huge), I muttered with resentment.

“Damn it, my tuna sashimi...”

“I’ll take you to eat some later, so stop whining.”

“No, I vow to eat a fresh, living melting tuna! Nom nom...”

“Stop eating that grilled tuna and kill the fishermen!”

I was quite sad from being unable to eat the tuna sashimi that I had been looking forward to so much. Regardless, I had no problem killing the monsters in the A+-rank dungeon, Graveyard Over the Lake. I didn’t even have to use Thunder Beast.

If it was me from the time I killed the Giant Iron Boar, I would undoubtedly have had trouble killing them, but in just a few months of leveling up and gaining battle experience, A+-rank monsters died in just a few punches from me. I once again realized the importance of stats.

“Strong.”

“I’m unneeded.”

“Same, but why so suddenly, Paul? We were only eating popcorn since a while ago.”

When Paul spoke dispiritedly, Mike responded with surprise. Hearing their conversation, I lightly smiled and asked.

“Why aren’t more melting tunas appearing? Since that first tuna,

we've only seen those disgusting fishmen or those toothsaws trying to poke holes in our boat like woodpeckers."

"There aren't that many of them. We were lucky to have seen that one."

"I turned a precious guy into a grilled fish..."

Since I already cooked the tuna, we couldn't sell it. Hwaya lied saying that she'd store it using her extradimensional storage magic, and put it in her inventory. I didn't care, thinking I could always catch another one, but to think it was so rare... If she didn't give me my share later, bloodshed would be inevitable. Striking my lightning fist into a fishman's body, I pledged to myself.

After I stayed on the ship for three hours, I finally understood why Hwaya seemed to be crying every time she contacted me.

"This lake is really big. There's just no end to it. Was Windermere Lake always this big?"

"Of course not. When it became a dungeon, the area strangely became bigger. That's why we aren't sure just how long we'll have to continue. According to other countries' reports, the number of normal monsters decreases significantly when the Field Dungeon's boss is killed... But we haven't been able to find that boss."

Hwaya threw another fireball into the water as she answered my question. The toothsaw that was trying to drill into the ship made

its death throes and sunk into the water. Watching the toothsaw, I muttered.

“Shark fin...”

“Don’t. An S-ranker from China already tried it, and apparently the texture of toothsaw’s fin isn’t as good as other sharks. In fact, because it’s so hard, ability users other than body reinforcement types can’t even eat it.”

“Did the Chinese S-ranker finish it? Did he say it was tasty?”

“No, he wasn’t a body reinforcement type ability user, so his teeth broke.”

“Kuk, so he at least tried, that S-ranker...!”

Giving up on the shark fin, I raised my head. It was already past four in the afternoon. The cold winter lake wind blew against my platinum blonde hair. Looking at the town that was only a dot over the horizon, I murmured.

“Even going back will take some time.”

“Yep, we’re going to go back soon. So? You understand why I said it would take a long time, right?”

“Yeah, you did well until now. Of course, since I’m here, it’ll be



much faster.”

“Haha, at least your confidence doesn’t lose to an SS-ranker.”

As Hwaya and I were talking, Mike nodded his head and remarked.

“You are indeed worthy of the name Thunder Knight.”

Hwaya took care of the toothsaws and I took care of the fishmen. Other than when we met the melting tuna, Paul and Mike only stood by. As for Madam Brown, she had spent the entire afternoon enjoying the lake winds. According to her, it was better if she didn’t need to use her ability. She really had the mindset of a healer.

Although we encountered many monsters on our way back, no melting tunas appeared, and we didn’t even catch a glimpse of the boss monster. When we spent over three hours to get back to the dock, the sky had turned completely dark. The sun wasn’t out for long even in Britain’s winter.

“T.K., let’s go get some drinks with dinner.”

“Okay.”

Mike offered with his hand on my shoulder, and I gave him a thumbs up. Paul seemed to want to join in, while Madam Brown said her goodbyes and went back to her lodging. Hwaya then sent

me a message as she gestured at me.

[Let's go finish the grilled tuna. Time is frozen in the inventory, so it'll be delicious and fresh. I'll treat you to the ultimate wine.]

[You know just what I want! Call!]

I exchanged glances with Hwaya and took Mike's hand off of my shoulder.

"Now that I think about it, I have to teach Hwaya how to control her mana. We'll have to drink tomorrow."

"That's not suspicious at all, hehe. Mastiford's fans across the globe will cry."

"Paul, let's leave the young lovers alone and go out for a drink with just the two of us!"

"Alright, since that's the case, let's drink until dawn, Mike!"

Paul and Mike walked away with a huge misunderstanding about me and Hwaya. Since I couldn't be bothered with chasing after them and correcting the misunderstanding, I simply followed Hwaya to her lodging. When I was watching the countless stars in the night sky with awe, Hwaya opened her mouth.

"You've spent a day with them now. How were they? They're

good people, right?”

“Yeah. I think Britain’s quite lucky. Although Brightman is here too, I was quite surprised there were so many people with camaraderie and clear hearts, even with their great strengths.”

At my compliment, Hwaya let out a dry cough and puffed out her chest. I wished she’d restrain herself a bit with how bountiful her chest was. I didn’t know where to look.

“Britain is a great country! Ah, I like Korea too. There are many good people in Korea too. Plus, I love Korean food. My mom is a great cook. But still, I like this country, Britain.”

“I think being proud of the country you were born in is a good thing.”

I replied with a bitter smile. She also responded with a bitter smile. Then, neither of us said anything.

We arrived at her lodgings and opened the door. As Hwaya was about to go in without much thought, I stopped her. With a smile, I closed the door. As I thought, he didn’t listen to my warning.

Thinking that, I opened my eyes sharply and shouted.

“Ruyue, Peika, restrain him!”

[Aoooooooo!]

The lodging was instantly surrounded by a wall of ice. A gasp rang out along with the sound of a window opening. A large amount of electricity sparked in the air. A black clothed man trying to escape from the window had become enveloped in Peika's lightning curtain.

“Kuk!”

The moment I heard his voice, I was reminded of someone.

“Ruyue!”

[You can't run!]

After falling on the ground, the black clothed man tried to escape without caring for the pain or injury he suffered, but Ruyue froze his feet before he could move. With his feet frozen to the ground, he couldn't move in the slightest. Peika created a spear of lightning in the air.

[Master, do I kill him?]

“Paralyze him for now! Don't let him take anything out!”

At my order, Peika sent her lightning flying toward him. As I expected, he tried to reach into an invisible pocket of dimension in

mid-air. However, Peika's lightning struck him before he could take anything out. He trembled as he foamed at the mouth. Meanwhile, Ruyue's ice crept up from his feet to his shin, knees, then waist. He was being restrained perfectly.

Good, with this, he wouldn't be able to escape to the dungeon.

I stood in front of him. It seemed he snapped out of the paralysis as he sent a fist imbued with blue light toward me. However, I likewise imbued my hand with white light and grabbed his fist. He flinched as he trembled.

“How disappointing.”

With that, I squeezed the fist in my hand. Crack. With an unpleasant sound, his finger bones snapped. His other fist instantly flew toward me shining with a strange light. Before what I expected was a skill could activate, I struck his elbow up. Crack. With another unpleasant sound, his arm snapped.

“Kuuk...!”

“I didn't think you were this kind of person.”

“What? Shin... Do you know him?”

Seeing Hwaya standing still and blinking at me until the situation was taken care of, I was reminded how bad magicians were with using their bodies. On her shoulder was a small flame cat. It

seemed she at least knew how to protect herself. I gave her 6 points out of 10.

I answered Hwaya.

“Didn’t you realize?”

“Realize what?”

To prevent him from opening the door to the dungeon, I grabbed his other arm and bent it. Although he tried to resist me with his mana, my strength was vastly higher than his. He was undoubtedly a strong explorer, but I could so easily break his arm.

“Kuu!”

“... Hm?”

Even after hearing his voice, Hwaya tilted her head. You, that’s uncharacteristically cute, so it’s forbidden from now. I calmed my heart beating because of her, and told her the answer.

“It’s Walker. Edward Walker.”

“Ah, Walker! So that’s who it was... Walker!?”

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Author’s note:

Walker finally appears! And gets beaten the moment he does! But it was to be expected. Walker is an explorer from the Third Dungeon... (tears)

## Chapter 96. Granting Freedom (3)

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Hwaya's eyes opened wide. It was to be expected. She probably didn't expect Walker's name to suddenly pop out.

But I was sure. The black clothed man who was frozen up to his stomach was undoubtedly Edward Walker. I could tell from his voice. Seeing him use a skill, I became even more confident.

I took off the mask he was wearing. A brown eyed and brown haired middle-age man was revealed underneath. Although he was gritting his teeth and glaring at me, I didn't pay it any attention and grabbed his face. Pzzt. Sparks flashed. This strong resistance. I was confident.

“You even have an item that hides your identity.”

“Like the one you're wearing?”

“I already said sorry.”

I let Walker go. Since he could have Return skill like me (though he would have used it by now), I broke his two legs to leave behind an evidence he couldn't get rid of. Although I wasn't sure how severe the state of his arms and legs were, they were not of my concern.

“Kuuuuk!”



“Walker, sneaking into a lady’s room is something only a piece of trash would do. Don’t you think so?”

“Kuuuu....!”

“You see, I’m quite angry. It could be because I have a younger sister, but it doesn’t feel like someone else’s problem. I might be a bit harsh... so start talking.”

First, I lightly punched his stomach. The mana surrounding his body undulated and a strong blue light shot out for a moment. From the resistance I felt against my fist, it seemed he was wearing a shock-reducing item, as it only reacted to physical shock, not to lightning or ice. No, perhaps the item reacted, but couldn’t win against them.

I wondered how it worked. Was it a one-time use item? Or did it have a set number of uses? Perhaps, it simply activated using his mana. To answer my question, I punched Walker again. He frowned, and, at the same time, another blue light shot out.

It seemed he was using his own mana. Deciding that it was best to deplete his mana before he could do something to escape, I punched him repeatedly.

“Don’t even pretend to be someone else.”

“I’m... Walker. Kuk...!”

“Sorry, let me deplete your mana first.”

“I... won’t resist!”

“I don’t believe you, so shut up.”

I beat him repeatedly. When the blue light subsided completely, Walker’s pupils dilated. It was the sign that his lack of mana was affecting his mind.

“Kuk... Yeon Hwawoo, you brute...! I was only inside here!”

“What, you were just trying to sneak a peek on Hwaya taking a bath? Did someone like you crawl into an SS-ranker’s lodge to play tag? If you’re going to continue your nonsense, I can always hit you more.”

“...”

“You, why would a dungeon explorer like you work under someone like Brightman?”

I, of course, judged that Walker was Brightman’s subordinate and was acting on his orders. To be honest, it was rather obvious. Hwaya was also nodding her head in agreement.

“Would you believe me if I said I wasn’t?”

When I raised my fist without a reply, Walker let out a deep sigh.

“You really are a brute... uk!”

“First, take off that item.”

Walker glared at me, then reached his hands out to unequip his item. Then, realizing that his arms were broken, he murmured something. Surprisingly, something thin came off of his face, and he became a black haired, green eyed young man. Although his facial lines were rather thick, his green eyes gave a calming impression.

“Ah, give me that item of course.”

“... It’s a Floor Shop item, so it’s untradeable.”

“Oh, I see.”

When I picked it up, it came in my possession without any resistance. He was lying.

[Ghostface (Unique)

Durability – 98/110

Equipment Limit – Level 40+, Magic 50+

Option – Magic -20, Dexterity +15

Skill – Ghostface: Wearing this item will allow you to change your appearance into someone you saw before. However, as the item uses your mana, you cannot use a portion of your mana while the item is equipped.]

The moment the item description popped up, I punched Walker's stomach again. As expected, blue light once again shot up. He was undoubtedly trying to do something, as he gritted his teeth at my attack.

"You son of a bitch!"

"You're the son of a bitch here."

I depleted his mana once again and put Ghostface in my inventory.

"Can you disarm yourself next?"

"I can't move my body. Heal my arm at least."

"Okay, I'll just take them off myself."

“Kyak, what are you doing when I’m watching!?”

Just like that, Walker was stripped until even his important parts were showing (Hwaya screamed and turned away). I put on some random clothes on Walker, and burned his undergarments. Then, I checked his equipment, and found what I was looking for.

“Here it is.”

[Serina’s Guardian Bracelet (Epic)

Durability – 551/1,120

Equipment Limit – Bound to Edward Walker. Other who equip it will not receive its effects.

Option – All stats + 10, Constitution +10

Skill – Serina’s Protection: Upon receiving physical or magical attacks that surpasses its wearer’s defense, it automatically uses mana to protect its wearer.]

“Epic, huh...”

I didn’t know at first, but I also had epic-grade items. Crimson Dragon Scale Armor Set, Crimson Dragon, Red Dragon Felixes’

Cape, and Gluttony Spear were all epic-grade items.

As I didn't expect walker to have such a precious item, I couldn't help but let out an exclamation of surprise. However, as I already knew, epic-grade items became bound to their first wearers. Others who equipped them weren't able to enjoy their effects. As such, I ordered Peika to destroy Serina's Guardian Bracelet. It was a shame, but there was no other choice since I couldn't equip it.

"No, do you know how precious that is!?"

"Walker, just shut up."

I checked the rest of his equipment, but they were only rare-grade at best. I put them together in a pile and burned them up. Walker bit his lips and cursed.

"You son of a bitch. No, you son of a devil."

"Now, let's hear your story."

"Like this?"

"Your mouth isn't hurt. You, why are you working under Brightman? Don't tell me you made him a dungeon explorer. Though, there's still only 6 people in Earth's dungeon explorer rankings..."

“You think I’m crazy? Compared to him, the only thing I have going for me is that I’m a dungeon explorer. He doesn’t know that I can go to a place outside this world and grow my ability... Plus, it just happens that my clan has been serving Brightman’s clan for generations.”

It really was a simple reason. Although I had doubts, Hwaya seemed to have accepted it.

“It’s possible.”

“Hey, it’s the 21st century.”

“Shin, in this world, there are lots of people living lives you can’t even imagine.”

“That’s... Okay, I understand.”

I looked at Walker and fell into thought. I didn’t think I would beat Walker half-dead when I came over for dinner. It was so absurd that I felt like I was looking at an answer to a math problem without any work.

“Then why were you spying on Hwaya?”

“You two are really quite friendly. Calling her Hwaya... I’ve never seen Mastiford allow someone to call her by her first name.”

“Walker, I thought you were smart...”

Perhaps, even though he understood the dangerous situation he was in, he might have wanted to show that his mind had not yielded to me. Or, he was simply comforting himself by telling himself that he had not completely lost yet. I didn't care either way, but I didn't have any intention of letting this drag out any longer. Did I have to resort to more violence?

Walker seemed to have noticed what I was thinking as he hurriedly continued.

“As you can imagine, it was Brightman's orders. He said to observe and report everything... He probably wanted to find something he could exploit. Not to mention, Yeon Hwawoo... though it's probably a fake name, you're also someone he ordered to observe. He was quite mad that Mastiford let you enter her lodging.”

“Ek, creepy...”

Hwaya scratched her arms, likely from goosebumps she must have received. If I were her, I would have been creeped out too...

“Mastiford, you didn't let your guard down often. The only thing I could deliver to Brightman was a picture of you taking a shower that I took between the door gap.”

“Kyaaaak!”



Hwaya screamed and threw her flame cat at Walker. The clothes I took the trouble to put on him were burned instantly.

“KUaaaaak!”

“Hwaya, calm down. Murder is bad.”

“Creepy, creepy, this is the worst! Brightman who ordered to take pictures of me secretly and Walker who carried it out! I want to kill them both! I’m going to kill them both!”

“Be patient for now. I had something in mind. Unless you’re really going to kill Walker, why don’t you hear me out?”

“Huu, huu, huu...! You have a plan? I’ll hear it out.”

Walker breathed roughly and retrieved her flame cat. After half-burning a man to cinders, the cat turned around and meowed cutely.

I thought she’d refuse, but she regained her composure rather quickly. In the end, it seemed she was thinking the same thing I was.

“Really... kuk, you’re letting me show very embarrassing parts of myself...!”

Half-burnt Walker murmured as he gritted his teeth. As I had

just finished talking with Hwaya, I replied to him, dumbfounded.

“You should have known this was going to happen if you were discovered.”

“Right... You, how did you pierce through my stealth? I was confident I would never be found out...”

“Don’t tell me you really thought I’d tell you... Alright, Walker, you have a few choices. Listen up.”

I raised a single finger up.

“First, you can go back to Brightman and reveal to the whole world that you’re involved with him.”

“You seem to be missing some preconditions there.”

“Of course, you’ll use your real face and reveal what you did. Although Brightman is behind you, the British government cares for Hwaya just as much. I can certain that it’ll be quite hard to have a proper life from then.”

“...”

Walker closed his mouth. I continued.

“Second, you can run away to the dungeon and never come back. It’s probably better than the first option, though, it’s still the same that you won’t be able to live on Earth.”

“Is there more?”

“Of course there is. Third, you can betray Brightman and come to our side.”

“... You think I will? After what you did to me?”

Walker asked me as if he had just heard the most absurd thing in the world. However, I nodded my head assertively.

“I think you will. You were only working under Brightman because you were born into it. If you thought about Brightman so much that you would always be loyal to him, you would have made him a dungeon explorer a long time ago.”

“Someone who knows that would do this to me!?”

“What you did was unforgivable after all. Even if you can become my ally, you’ll have to pay for your crimes.”

At my words, Walker became silent. Watching him, Hwaya burst out into laughter.

“Kukuk, so this is Walker who cared for himself so much and

didn't want to help... Walker, your actions frankly disgust me, but it's not unforgivable as you didn't make Brightman into a dungeon explorer. Although I wanted to end you no matter what Shin said... If you cooperate wholeheartedly from now, I can stop myself from ending your life. You should know this is an incredible mercy on my part."

"Someone who couldn't notice me until now shouldn't be so arrogant..."

"Uk."

After making Hwaya speechless, Walker turned his gaze toward me. Walker was certainly a dungeon explorer, as I could see his body naturally healing as time went on.

"I can't escape from him. Even before he became an ability user, the power and money he had was enormous. As long as I'm in Britain, I can't be free from his reach. Even if I can go into the dungeon, it would be the same when I come out. Unless I plan on living in the dungeon forever like you said, I can only be loyal to him. The only way I could resist him is not letting him know that I can turn him into a dungeon explorer."

"Setting aside the question of whether or not that was really the only way... Why can't you just leave Britain?"

"Were you listening to me? There's no way to leave Britain without him finding out."

“Why don’t I give a very simple example. During the Event Raid, you could have left for another country and stayed there.”

“...”

“You were just scared. Admit it. You didn’t have the courage to change the way you lived.”

“... Huu.”

After a short sigh, Walker revealed his true thoughts.

“As long as I was loyal to him, I could have anything I wanted. You’re right. Being able to thoughtlessly work under someone is indeed comfortable, and I grew used to it. Participating in a raid and running away? I don’t know how I would live after that. I was working under him the moment I was born. There wasn’t a single time where I acted on my own accord.”

“The reason you only laughed at others in the communication channel and never participated, was it just a defense mechanism?”

“No, that was because I simply thought you guys were idiots. It wasn’t a defense mechanism or the like. If jumping into danger on your own volition isn’t stupid, what is?”

“You’re doing exactly that right now...”

This guy, even if his body's a mess, he's mouth is alive... I decided to give him the ultimatum.

“Walker, make your decision. This is the last chance to change your lifestyle. If you agree, I'll separate you from Brightman completely. Pledging loyalty and living for Brightman for the rest of your life, or living in the dungeon without being able to come back to Earth. I can at least offer you a better lifestyle than that.”

“... I.”

Walker hesitated for a long time and finally answered.

Hearing his answer, I grinned.

## Chapter 97. Granting Freedom (4)

---

The dungeon's Residential Area was packed with people today, as always. However, I headed straight to my mansion. I wasn't going there to rest, but to visit Fairy Garden through the Fairy Spring. In the pavilion on the way to Loretta's log cabin, I saw someone I had not seen last time.

“Lin!”

“Oh, if it isn't Kang Shin, the Crown Prince who died on the 40th floor?”

“Kuk!”

I knew he would make fun of me! But why was he here? I gave him an inquisitive glance. At the same time, I noticed someone next to him. It was a cute girl with cat ears on her head, who was shaking her long tail slowly. It was Lokanyan.

“Hello, nyan.”

“Hello, Lokanyan!”

“My name isn't Lokanyan, it's Loka, nyan!”

“I see, Lokanyan.”

“Kyaaaaa!”

After making fun of Lokanyan, I turned my attention to Lin. Just like always, he had a cigarette in his mouth.

“Thanks to your vitality hitting zero, I became free for a week, so I’m enjoying my sweet vacation.”

“I see. Well, you must be tired from making all those equipment for me. Thanks again, Lin.”

“You really hate losing, don’t you...!?”

“Lin nyan, Loka nyan made cookies, nyan. Eat some, nyan! Everyone liked it, nyan!”

As Lin’s hand holding his cigarette shook, Lokanyan pushed a plate in front of him, which had cookie-like things piled on top of it. Were they items? I mean, they looked just like poison items!

“Ah, I was wondering where everyone went... Loka, you sent them away, I see.”

“That’s rude, nyan! Everyone shook because it was so delicious, nyan! Everyone said they’d bring them home to eat them, nyan!”

“There’s this much left after that...? Damn, they should’ve taken a bit more for me...!”



“Don’t say that, nyan! Try them, nyan! I put in lots of love for Lin, nyan!”

“I don’t need them... Ah, I know.”

“Alright, Lin, have a nice day. Lokanyan, I’m cheering for you!”

“Hey, wait! Kang Shin!”

“Oooh! You’re a good guy, nyan! Goodbye, nyan!”

I had no intention of trying out cookies that would make even a draconian tremble in fear. Putting an end to Lin’s attempt to get me to try those cookies, I wished him luck and headed to Loretta. I ignored Lin’s scream I vaguely heard behind me and spat on the ground. A girl was trying to give him handmade cookies! It was a situation straight out of a manhwa. Not to mention, the girl was a cat-eared beauty that embodied the word ‘cute’!

I hoped he would eat them and explode.

When Loretta first saw me, she welcomed me as she flapped her long ears. However, her ears drooped more and more as I explained the reason I was here.

“You want to learn a sword technique? To slice monsters for sashimi?”

My long and sad tale that no one could listen to without crying was cut off in the middle by Loretta. Then, she looked at me like she was looking at an idiot.

“You’re an idiot.”

She said it!

“Why don’t you make a hand knife and imbue mana into it?”

“I don’t have the confidence to control it carefully. Not to mention, it’s illogical to fillet a fish with a hand.”

“Why can’t you put mana into your spear?”

“I’m trying to hide the fact that I use spears.”

“You’re okay revealing that you can suddenly use swords?”

“I’m just learning it today, so it shouldn’t matter.”

“There’s a better method than that sweaty and brutish method, Shin-nim.”

When I heard Loretta’s words, I became slightly uneasy. Sure enough, she took out a kitchen knife glowing blue from her pocket.

“A kitchen knife forged by a master craftsman, able to slice all food ingredients, even if they are monsters, without having to know even the basic of sword techniques! Its name is ‘All Crusher!’”

“It’s not allowed to crush everything!”

“If it’s now, I will throw in ‘Burnt to White Ashes,’ a magical pot that can heat all food ingredients to the perfect temperature!”

“Both the kitchen knife and the pot have weird names... Also, it’s not allowed to burn things to white ashes!”

“Don’t be surprised, there’s more! ‘Drug,’ a magical seasoning that can sublimate the taste of any food with just a single sprinkle! If you eat it once, you might get addicted and never be able to escape it!”

“Drug? Is that a narcotic? It isn’t, right?”

“This mind-blowing combination of items is only 99,900 gold! They’re only 99,900 gold!”

“Just say 100,000 gold.”

“From my heart for Shin-nim, the 100 gold is... a service!”

Seeing Loretta make a heart with her two hands, I really considered flicking her forehead, but held myself back. Instead, I took out 100,000 gold and gave it to her.

“No, I just need 99,900 gold.”

“Then I’ll give 100 gold more as a service from my heart for Loretta.”

“O-Oh.”

Loretta’s ears flapped wildly. I only gave back the gold she discounted, but she was incredibly happy. This elf really liked money. Then, Loretta spoke as she gave me the items with a blooming smile.

“Okay, I’ll serve you some tea, so stay for a while. Huhu, Shin-nim is quite skilled at bargaining.”

“Hm? Ah, tea time with Loretta is good too, but there’s something I want to ask.”

I put the kitchen knife, pot, and seasoning into my inventory, and tried to make a serious expression to explain what had happened today. That I had met another explorer as an enemy and that he was currently restrained.

Although Walker had agreed to betray Brightman, I had just beat him up severely, and it wasn’t so easy to trust Walker, who had

spent his entire life under Brightman's orders. I needed a way to ensure he wouldn't change his mind.

After listening to my story, Loretta made a thinking 'hmmm,' then rummaged through her pocket with a small exclamation.

"Something perfect for Shin-nim is right... here. Soul Contract."

It had a very dangerous sounding name.

"Let's see, since you've made more than two achievements, you can buy this too. It's pretty easy to use. You write the content both sides of the contract should keep with your blood. It doesn't matter what language you write it in. After that, say that you'll form a soul contract, and the contract will activate."

"That's it? It's that simple?"

"Ah, if either person violates the contract, the other person will take his soul, so be careful."

"This is a really dangerous contract!"

"But you need something like this, right?"

Loretta rolled the Soul Contract and gave it to me.

“It’s 1,000,000 gold, but since no one’s bought it for 500 years, I’ll give it to you for 500,000 gold. That’s the manufacture cost.”

“A 50% discount, wow. It’s still expensive though... Alright, here.”

Dullahan gave 100,000 gold each time I defeated him, and as I defeated him over 80 times, I wasn’t short on money. Even with the price I paid for Party Member Scarecrows, Floor Master Battle Vouchers, potions, equipment repair cost, and the equipment crafting cost I paid to Lin, I still had about 7,000,000 gold left. That is, I could spare 500,000 gold with only a light burden.

“Thanks for your purchase, customer!”

“Thanks, Loretta. I knew coming to you was a good idea.”

“I, I’m... glad to be of help. I-If you there’s anything troubling you, you can always look for me! As long as you pay for it, I can even make something I don’t have!”

“No, I’ll try to get Lin to take care of most of my needs. I’m here because my vitality hit zero. I did meet Lin, but I couldn’t bother him during his date.”

“... So you won’t come over anymore?”

Loretta’s ears drooped down. It was cute in a way, so I wanted to keep watching her, but Loretta’s depressed appearance startled

me, and I was making an excuse before I noticed it.

“N-No! I meant I won’t visit Loretta only when I have something I need. I’ll come over often, as long as it doesn’t bother Loretta.”

“It doesn’t bother me at all. In fact, I’m almost bored to death! So please come over a lot!”

No, if you’re that bored, do work... Aren’t you the guild master...?

\*

When I came back after some tea, Walker was crawling on the ground with his body and mouth wrapped in boxing tape.

“Walker, caterpillar suits you well too...”

“Mmmm!”

“His talking annoyed me, so I shut him up.”

Hwaya was glaring at Walker with a reddened face. I first took the boxing tape off of Walker’s mouth. Puha! He coughed out a mouthful of breath and complained.

“Damn it, I was only curious if Mastiford and you-kuaaak!”

“Walker, are you perhaps just stupid?”

Walker became a burning caterpillar and was wriggling violently, but I decided to leave him be until Hwaya calmed down. When Walker was letting out a slightly smoked smell, I showed him the contract.

“Alright, let’s organize the content of the contract between us.”

“You really are thorough. You even prepared something like this... What meaning is there to a contract? Don’t tell me you think you could restrain me with the law?”

“No, and I’m not trying to restrain you. This is Soul Contract, just something that gives me your soul if you break the contract. Don’t worry about it too much.”

“How can I not worry about it!? I’d rather be restrained by the law!”

“But you have no choice!”

“Damn it, no! I’m not doing it!”

“What, so you were planning on breaking your promise...?”

Hwaya spoke with a low voice and made a flame on her hand. A



white flame. It was an incredibly hot flame. Walker seemed to have noticed how dangerous it was, as he swallowed his saliva. Then, he silently pulled the contract toward him.

Clause one. Edward Walker (it was his real name) will not be able to directly or indirectly harm Hwaya Eleni Mastiford or Kang Shin, and this applies to their family, relatives, and friends.

“Well, of course, but I’m a bit worried just what ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ encompasses.”

“Simply put, you’re not allowed to curse. Also, if you try to peek on me again, your soul might go flying from the mental stress I might take.”

“I won’t do it!”

Clause two. Kang Shin will safely take Edward Walker to Korea, and help him live a free life given that he does not violate the first clause.

“But what’s your plan? It won’t be easy to avoid Brightman’s eyes.”

“Don’t worry, I have my ways.”

Clause three. Edward Walker will carry out the following missions in exchange for not revealing his perverted actions publicly and privately.

First. Destroy all information about Hwaya Eleni Mastiford in Brightman's possession, and use his ability as a dungeon explorer to assist her to the greatest extent possible. Also, before Hwaya Eleni Mastiford gives her permission, do not appoint anyone as a dungeon explorer.

Second. Guard Kang Shin's younger sister, Kang Yua, perfectly.

"What's this?"

"It's exactly what it says. Brightman that bastard has a picture of me taking a bath... I hate it! Get rid of it all! Also, when I make my dungeon explorer organization later, you have to help. I'll need your authority to appoint a dungeon explorer then too... That's my condition."

"No, I expected the first mission... Yeon Hwawoo, or rather, Kang Shin. What do you mean guarding your younger sister?"

"What are you talking about? I'm only accepting you to our side because of it."

I said as I glared at Walker.

"You see, my young sister is dangerously cute. Although I installed some safety devices, we live in a dangerous world. When something happens to my young sister and she's in trouble, I need someone to protect her until I get there. Your stealth ability and

physical ability is perfect for a guard!

“You... just for something like that...”

“Something like that?”

The fist I raised up flickered with lightning. Should I kill this bastard? Hwaya sighed and stopped me.

“You only need to guard Shin’s younger sister from morning to afternoon, so you’ll be free after that. You can be in the dungeon or whatever then. What dungeon did you say you were from again?”

“The Third Dungeon... damn it, my daily life is going to be completely gone.”

“Ah, you’re so noisy! You’ll be free on the weekends! Just think of it as a job!”

“Kuk, a job of secretly guarding some young chick... I’d rather stay in the dungeon for the rest of my life.”

“Shin, don’t kill him.”

I was already punching Walker’s face, but thankfully, he didn’t die.

“Hmph, you’ll understand when you see my sister. In fact, you’ll be thankful that I gave you the opportunity to guard such a pretty and cute reincarnation of an archangel.”

“Kuuk... She’s that pretty?”

“If you lay a single finger on her, you’re dead. I’ll rip you to shreds and burn you to cinders. I’ll bring you back to life, kill you again, find you in hell, and turn you into powder.”

“I-It’s in the contract! I know even if you don’t threaten me!”

Clause four. When requested by Hwaya Eleni Mastiford or Kang Shin, Edward Walker will participate in Event Raids and Event Dungeons. This clause takes priority over the second and third clause.

“That’s it.”

“You sure ask a lot of me...”

“You don’t like it? Want me to give you a salary too?”

“I don’t need it. I don’t need you bossing me around even more.”

“Alright then, repeat after me. I form a soul contract.”

“Huu.... Damn it. I form a soul contract.”

The moment we made our announcements, the Soul Contract floated up into the air and burned splendidly. Walker felt pain immediately afterwards and rolled on the ground.

“Kuuuuuuak!”

“Ah, maybe you can’t curse us inwardly either. I heard your heart starts to hurt when the contract is about to be breached. If you continue, your soul will fly out, so be careful.”

“Take it back, damn it, take it back! Kuaaaaaak!”

I wasn’t sure how long it would for Walker to calm down, but it was none of my business. After finishing my business with Walker, I got up from my seat with a refreshed mind. Hwaya looked up at me with curious eyes.

“Where are you going? Dealing with Walker and even going to the dungeon to get items, we didn’t even eat dinner yet.”

“Huu, Hwaya, there’s something I have to do. Something really important that I have to do right now.”

“I don’t know what it is... but do you need help?”

“No, it’s something I have to do myself. Alright... I’m off then. I

might be late, so you can eat first.”

“O-Okay. Good luck...?”

Even as she waved me goodbye, Hwaya tilted her head curiously. I left her lodging. The town and lake were both completely dark. There was no one in sight, and far in the lake, a melting tuna was breaching over the water...! Checking again that no one was around, I equipped my Crimson Dragon Scale Armor. In my hand was the All Crusher.

“Melting tuna sashimi... Wait for me, I’m coming!”

The next morning, there was a report of a strange monster running above the lake waters (borrowing Ruyue’s power), screaming to attract monsters (Provoke), and calling down storms to slaughter them (Elemental Tempest). Thankfully, they hadn’t seen me slice the melting tuna for sashimi...!

## Chapter 98. Granting Freedom (5)

---

Walker carried out his mission swiftly and precisely. Although he looked pathetic when I was beating him up, his stealth ability was truly good enough to trick an SS ranker. In just two days, he brought us all of the data Brightman had on Hwaya.

“I destroyed or burned everything that I couldn’t bring. There isn’t even a single word or photo left of you.”

Walker assured us. Since neither the contract nor his personality made it likely that he’d lie, Hwaya quickly burned everything in front of her and nodded.

“Alright, good.”

“But he will definitely find out I was the one who did it. Simply put, I just burned the bridge connecting us.”

“Good, Walker. You can now stay in the dungeon until I’m done with my business here. You can come with me when I go back to Korea.”

“... Even if I use my stealth ability, Brightman will find out if I leave the country with you. He’s watching you closely. You already know, right?”

“There won’t be any problem... Don’t worry. I don’t want him to discover my identity either. He doesn’t know how I came here,

right?”

“No one here knew you were coming until you arrived at Windermere. Mastiford was thorough in hiding her tracks.”

“Huhu, it wasn’t much.”

Hwaya was wearing a proud smile. Of course, as Hwaya was an SS ranker, it wasn’t weird that she had allies that could hide from Brightman.

“It’s fine then. When I go back, I’ll be using my own method. You can come with me then, Walker.”

“Your method, huh...? You must have a special skill.”

“Yep, exactly. So you can just focus on the dungeon before then... Ah.”

I almost forgot.

“Walker, here.”

“What’s... This is Serina’s Guardian Bracelet!”

Walker grabbed the bracelet I held out and his eyes opened wide.



“Ah, it’s a bit different. Lin said he added something to it.”

“But how...? Didn’t you shatter and burn it!?”

“Mm, yeah, but it seems the important parts were fine. It’s a reward for doing your job well and for all the work you’ll do in the future.”

In truth, I took the remains of the broken bracelet to Lin at Fairy Garden, thinking maybe he could make a new item. As the important parts of it were still okay, a new bracelet was made using First Dungeon’s monster drop items. The resulting guardian bracelet was even better than the old one, but unfortunately, it was still bound to Walker. Although I thought about breaking it again, since he would be in charge of protecting my sister, I decided to give it back to him.

“Ku... I thought I’d never see it again...”

Walker looked touched as he rubbed the guardian bracelet on his cheek. I tried my best to ignore the rather disgusting scene.

“Since you’re the one who broke it in the first place, I won’t thank you. But I can promise I will do my utmost to fulfill the contents of the contract.”

“Of course.”

Although we wouldn’t ever come to like each other, Walker’s

hostility toward Hwaya and me seemed to have lessened now that he got his bracelet back. After equipping the guardian bracelet, he went back to the dungeon. According to him, he was on the 44th floor.

“By the way, Shin, what dungeon are you from? You said you weren’t Gold ranked yet, right? But since you overwhelmed Walker like that, are you perhaps also in the Second Dungeon?”

Hwaya asked casually. I also responded casually.

“I’m in the First Dungeon.”

“What, why are you in the First!? Even I’m in the Second!”

Yep, I knew she’d get angry.

“My father is a First Dungeon explorer. Since he appointed me as an explorer, I’d naturally be in the First Dungeon.”

“Uuuk, t-that means your friend is also in the First Dungeon...”

“Right.”

“Uuuguu! But I’m stronger! I want to be in the First Dungeon too!”

“No... You should give up.”

“I won’t! I’ll become Platinum ranked and go to the First Dungeon!”

“What?”

I raised my head.

“What do you mean? You’ll become Platinum ranked and go to the First Dungeon?”

“You didn’t know? The way to go to a higher ranked Dungeon.”

“This is the first time I’ve heard about it.”

As I wore a dumbfounded look, Hwaya began to explain.

“I only found out after I broke through the 65th floor. In the Second Dungeon, you’ll become a Platinum ranked explorer after the 80th floor, and if you complete a certain achievement on top of that, you can become a First Dungeon explorer with your level adjusted!”

“What’s the achievement?”

“I don’t know!”

“ ... ”

I looked at her like she was an idiot. She seemed to have noticed what I was thinking, as she pinched my arm, then writhed in pain with her hurt fingers. However, she soon continued triumphantly.

“But you know, if it’s an achievement, it’s probably something like that. I already have one. Huhu, burning over half the monster in the dungeon floor at the same time! I even got a title, ‘Incarnation of Agni.’ Amazing, right?”

“Agni. The god of fire from Hindu mythology. T-That’s amazing...”

I couldn’t bring myself to tell her that I had a god’s true name.

“Did you get an achievement yet? Ah, it’s fine even if you haven’t. It’s just that I’m too amazing. I think you’re skilled too. Plus, you’ll continue to get stronger, so you’ll have lots of chances to obtain an achievement.”

I completely ignored her consoling words and continued.

“Hwaya, I don’t know what achievement you have to make to become a First Dungeon explorer, but I’ll tell you the achievements I’ve made so far, so you can refer to them.”

“Achievements, plural!?”

“First, breaking through four floors in 7 hours.”

“... Are you human?”

“Second, challenging a Floor Master alone on your first try and defeating him. The achievement is better if you’re the first one in the Second Dungeon’s history to do it.”

“You... really?”

“Really.”

“...”

“Even if you aren’t the first, defeating a Floor Master alone still counts as an achievement, and beating an Event Raid with few participants also counts as an achievement. But they aren’t anything big, so I doubt those will be it.”

“...”

“Obtaining a god’s true name can be a great achievement. Since you already have Incarnation of Agni, you might be able to obtain Agni’s true name if you try harder. Like if you could burn all the monsters in a dungeon floor at the same time.”

“... Huu.”

Hwaya, who was listening to me silently, became dispirited. Then, she blurted out.

“I’m jealous.”

“You really are honest...”

“Uuu, I hate it. I hate myself and I hate you. Why am I jealous of you...? Our dungeons are different and our battle styles are different... but still... I’m jealous!”

Seeing Hwaya play with her hair, not knowing what to do, I asked.

“So, are you just going to stay jealous?”

“Of course not! God’s true name, right? Defeating a Floor Master alone? Uuu, just you watch! I’ll achieve them and become a First Dungeon explorer. Prepare yourself. Now will be the only time you can talk so arrogantly! Got it, Kang Shin?”

Ooh, she’s fired up! I answered her enthusiastic words with a smile. I really liked people that weren’t overconfident. I liked hard-working people even more.

“Good luck, I’ll be cheering for you.”

“Don’t cheer me on with such a kind face! My hostility is disappearing!”

“You shouldn’t be hostile towards your friend...”

As I answered Hwaya with amusement, a question suddenly popped up in my head.

If there was a way to go from the Second Dungeon to the First Dungeon... Where could I go from the First Dungeon?

\*

After I joined Hwaya’s team, our hunting speed more than tripled. As I easily took care of the fishmen that were causing the most problems for them, it was only natural. Furthermore, every time I screamed on the ship, monsters flocked toward us, allowing us to take care of them in one go.

“Amazing. How can T.K.’s voice provoke other monsters?”

“I don’t know, maybe they know I’m strong, so they’re coming to fight together?”

I gave a half-hearted reply and punched a nearby fishman. Hwaya, who could surmise the reason, grinned and sent her fireballs flying without saying anything.

Just like that, four days passed. By the time I stored over ten melting tunas in my inventory, the lake had begun to change. Simply put, the monsters became stronger. The number of fishermen decreased, and the number of melting tunas and toothsaws increased. Although it was a very good thing for me, it was undoubtedly an unusually change.

Then, on the seventh day after I arrived at Windermere, while we were fighting melting tunas and toothsaws wildly, our ship came face to face with Brightman's ship. Although there were only five people on our ship, Brightman had seven people on his. Besides Tommy, who was on the ship even though he still hadn't fully recovered, Brightman was the only British ranker. I knew they had an A+ rank healer, so four other S rankers had come to aid Brightman.

"Miss Mastiford, you've been doing extremely well lately."

"We only have elites. You and I aren't close enough to be chatting like this, so why don't you turn your ship around and leave?"

"Huu, how cold, even though I'm always thinking about you."

"You're always thinking about me, you say...? That's really, really creepy."

Brightman flinched, seeming having sensed something from Hwaya's sizzling voice. Then, he continued.



“By the way, Miss Mastiford, I forgot to put a collar on my pet dog, and he ran away. I’m looking for him, but I can’t seem to find him. He’s a brown-haired dachshund. Have you seen him?”

“I don’t know why you’re asking me about your lost dog, Brightman. Ah, I don’t know about a dog, but I did see a black cockroach in my house... I instantly burned it to cinders.”

“... Ah, I see. My bad.”

Then, Brightman glared at me for some reason. What, why are you looking at me? Hwaya seemed to have noticed who Brightman was looking at as she snorted. Then, she lowered the tone of her voice and growled at Brightman.

“Brightman, I’m warning you. If you overstep your boundaries, I’m prepared to do the same. I’m proud that you are British, but I’m disillusioned the more I interact with you. You’re one of the superhumans representing our country. You should know what that means. Understood?”

“Hahaha, you’re funny, Miss Mastiford. Of course I understand what that means. Miss Mastiford is also a superhuman representing our country. Don’t you think we’re perfect for each other?”

“I’m telling you to shut up before the number of superhumans representing our country is reduced to one.”

Brightman was the one who ordered Walker to observe Hwaya and even take pictures of her secretly.

Just like I thought when I first obtained the evidence of Brightman's wrongdoing, the British government would most likely refuse to do anything that would harm Brightman. It didn't matter what crimes he committed. Although I didn't know it at first, Brightman supposedly had an overwhelming influence over the British government and Guardian. Since he had political power, monetary power, and military power, it was understandable.

In other words, although they were both SS rankers, Brightman had a higher standing in Britain. There were undoubtedly many supporters of Hwaya, but it was probably only to the extent that they didn't get in the way of Brightman.

No matter how much Hwaya loved her country, if Britain continued to ignore Brightman's overbearing actions, Hwaya might lose her patience. That was what Hwaya was warning him about.

"Miss Mastiford... How can you say that? As fellow British nobles, aren't you embarrassed?"

"Embarrassed? Would someone who knows what embarrassment is do what you've been doing?"

"Tsk... Miss Mastiford, you weren't like this before. As I thought,

you shouldn't hang out with people outside of your class."

Hwaya made a huge flame and threw it. It hit the water between our ship and Brightman's ship, exploding with a thundering roar and making an enormous amount of steam rise up.

"Don't. Insult. My. Friend."

Although her voice wasn't loud, her voice reached my ears clearly.

"At the very least, they're better than a piece of trash like you. Brightman, if you really are a noble, if you really think about Britain and its future, you should screw the hell off and not involve yourself with me. Dig open those filthy earholes and let my words stick in your mind! I won't ever like a scumbag like you! I never did and I never will! So turn your ship around and screw off, you oldie!"

"What a beautiful speech... If I do say so myself, her speech from just now should be placed above Churchill's commencement speech. She managed to pack her spirit and intentions into such a short speech."

"No, Mike, that's too much. I'd say it's about on the same level as Steve Jobs' commencement speech."

"You guys shouldn't make fun of commencement speeches like that. You'll get arrested."

As I clapped, I warned Mike and Paul who were saying some nonsense drivel. When they both gave me a thumbs up, I got the strong urge to break them, but I restrained myself.

However, rather than making Brightman turn his ship and leave, her shouting and flame seemed to have first called something.

Oooooong. For a moment, something created a strong vibration in the water.

“Whoa.”

“Mike!”

The moment something popped out of the water, Paul quickly pushed Mike away and blocked that something with his shield. Thanks to Paul’s timely defense, we were able to see the thing that was vibrating so strongly.

“It’s a saw!”

“A really big one too!”

As the words left my mouth, I created a specially large Thunder Arrow in my hand and threw it forward. When it hit the eye of the giant toothsaw, which was about to break through Paul’s shield with its sharp saw-snout, the giant toothsaw screamed and fell

back.

“So you could use lightning outside of just your fists!”

“Before that, take care of him! He has to be the Field Dungeon’s boss!”

Although normal toothsaws were large too, just this guy’s body was over 20 meters long. Naturally, his saw-snout was several meters long too. With that huge saw and its unnaturally strong vibration, it was possible that the ship would be cut in half. Hwaya gritted her teeth and created flames in both her hands.

“Looks like you’ll need my help!”

“Just don’t bother us, Brighman!”

Although Hwaya shot down Brightman’s offer immediately, as the boss of an A+ rank Field Dungeon could easily kill a ranker, refusing his offer wasn’t necessarily the best idea. Hwaya naturally became quieter, and knowing that, Brightman moved his ship forward towards us.

[Master, careful.]

“About what?”

[I can hear a singing voice. Other people will hear it soon too.]

“Singing voice...?”

[Protect your mind!]

Hearing Peika’s warning, I circulated Peruta Circuit, when a thought suddenly crossed my mind.

That giant toothsaw charging at us to cut our ship probably wasn’t the one singing. In that case...

“There are... two bosses?”

The moment I murmured...

[Lala~ Lalala~]

I began to hear a beautiful female singing voice. It was the kind of heavenly singing voice that charmed whoever heard it and made even the most tearless person cry.

It was the singing voice that gave this Field Dungeon the name, ‘Graveyard Over the Lake.’

# Chapter 99. Granting Freedom (6)

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[Lalala~ Lala~]

“Uh, woah!”

Brightman’s ship was the first to have problems. Its helmsman fainted, and the ship, which was heading toward us slowly, suddenly sped up greatly. Our ship’s helmsman was the next to faint, giving us no chance to move our ship. There was no doubt that the singing was attacking our minds, just like the voices of the sirens that attacked Odysseus on his way back to Ithaca!

“Mike, do something!”

“Shit. There’s not enough time...!”

“O wind!”

Thankfully, someone on Brightman’s ship seemed to be able to wield wind, as a strong wind suppressed the motor that had gone out of control, diverting Brightman’s ship away from us. However, after changing directions, they were charging towards the giant tooth saw.

“Hey, ramming it with your ship isn’t going to do much damage!”

“Stop saying stupid things and start chanting, Mike!”

Paul yelled at Mike and ran next to me. Then, the singing voice once again rang out.

[Lalala~ Lala~]

“Eh... Eh?”

Paul made a stupefied voice. Come on, S rankers, you should be able to endure some mental attacks! I urgently shouted in a loud voice.

“Everyone snap out of it!”

[You used Orc Lord's Warcry! All party members are cleansed of negative status effects. All party members' attack power increases by 50 percent for the duration. All party members become super-armored, unfazed by enemy attacks.]

The next moment, Paul, who was staggering, stood back up. His eyes were clear and unconfused.

“Wow, your shouting voice is amazing, T.K.! My mind feels clear, and I can feel strength surging through my body! I feel like I can even smack that guy to death with my shield!”



“You exaggerate too much! Just focus on blocking that thing’s attack! Hwaya, do you know where the voice is coming from?”

“I’ll find out!”

Since I had already revealed Thunder Arrow, I decided to use Peika’s abilities freely.

“Peika, please.”

[Leave it to me, Master! Thunder Spear!]

A large spear of lightning formed in mid-air, drawing everyone’s attention. I ignored their gazes and threw the lightning spear at the tooth saw. At the same time, I realized something important. Brightman’s ship was still charging straight at the tooth saw!

“What, why haven’t they recovered their consciousness!?”

“Oh, so your shout really did have a special power...!”

The moment Paul let out an exclamation of surprise, I realized. They weren’t my party members!

“Madam Brown!”

“I’m already on it! ‘Mind Recovery!’”

Madam Brown spread her arms out and used mind recovery magic. A few of the people on Brightman's ship raised their heads. Brightman was, of course, one of them.

“Kuk, what is this voice...!?”

“Brightman, turn the ship around!”

Paul shouted. Brightman and the other rankers realized the situation they were in and ran to the steering wheel. At the same time, the tooth saw began to move. Towards us.

“Eh?”

“Huk, it must be because you attacked it, T.K.!”

“Kuk... Fine, I'll take care of it.”

Because of the sheer size of the thing, I wasn't exactly sure what to do, so I decided to take care of it in an orderly way. First, its eyes. Then, its frightening saw. With that, I threw a second Thunder Spear at its eye.

[Kiaaaaa!]

[Lalala~]

The singing voice once again rang out. At the same time, hit by the Thunder Spear, the toothsaw screamed and swung its sawblade randomly. Then, it saw Brightman's ship, as Brightman and the others had once again fallen in a daze to the singing voice. Not only did they fail to turn the ship around, this time their wind magician also lost his consciousness. Come on, don't you guys have a healer too!?

“Oh no, they're too far from us! We'll have to go there ourselves...!”

“Agh, so annoying...!”

[Lalala~ Listen to my singing~]

“If it's singing, you should do it at a concert!”

I retorted angrily and once again threw a Thunder Spear at the toothsaw. Hwaya also shot a huge fireball at it.

“Come over here, you shark bastard!”

“Done! Ocean Guidance!”

Mike finished his magic at the perfect moment. Surprisingly, the rough lake waters began to roll artificially, and Brightman's ship began to move toward us.

“Oooh, Mike!”

“Hahaha, this is the power of my magic!”

“The magic’s name is Ocean’s ‘Guidance,’ but...”

[Lala~ Why aren’t you listening to me? Lalala~]

The girl’s voice was changing slightly. Throwing a Thunder Spear at the tooth saw, I asked Hwaya without facing her.

“Hwaya, did you find it yet?”

“Ah, sorry. I missed it because I was attacking the tooth saw.”

“Alright, then let’s just finish the tooth saw before it appears. Madam Brown, when that ship gets closer, use that recovery magic attack.”

“Leave it to me.”

When my attack stopped for just a moment, the tooth saw vibrated its sawblade strongly. Just when I was wondering what it would do, it stuck it beneath the water. Then, waves began to rise up violently. Come on, this was a lake, not the ocean! The waves rolled strongly, and Hwaya fell in the middle of shooting out her flames. Before she dropped her flames on the floor and caused a

disaster, I jerked her arm and held her in my embrace.

“Are you okay?”

“I’m not okay! How are you okay!?”

“Because I trained.”

Paul seemed to be hanging on, while Mike was floating in the air. Levitation! I heard about that magic before!

“Hwaya, didn’t you say you were originally a magician!? Can’t you use levitation?”

“I can... Hold me like this for a bit.”

“Got it.”

Supporting her with my chest and one arm, I used the other arm to continue throwing Thunder Spears. The problem wasn’t our ship, but Brightman’s. We managed to get it to approach our ship with Ocean Guidance, but because of the violent waves, the ship had stopped in the middle and was now trying to spit out its passengers! When I told the others about it, Mike responded.

“It’s probably easier to get them to come to our ship! The ship’s too heavy, it’s hard to drag it from so far!”

“Hey, say that earlier!”

Hwaya shouted in annoyance and threw a fireball. Immediately afterwards, the bottom of Brightman’s ship exploded and the ship cleanly flipped over. However, there was a problem. The tooth saw was charging at us. In its path were the people that fell overboard from Brightman’s ship.

“Mike, hurry!”

“That guy’s timing is impeccable!”

[Lalalala~ You don’t like my singing?]

“I don’t want to hear it!”

[How rude!]

The owner the voice responded to me for the first time. Hwaya also made her move. Using levitation, she floated up into the air. Then, she stretched her arms towards the tooth saw and shouted.

“Die!”

Two rays of white flames shot out from each of her hand, spiraling together and forming a thick white line. The next moment, the tooth saw’s eye exploded. As my Thunder Arrow had already destroyed its other eye, the tooth saw lost its vision. As a

result, it was now acting more violently.

[Kuaaaaaang!]

[Agh, shut up! Because of you, I can't sing!]

Weren't you guys friends!? Kuk, no, I can't listen to her! She might charm me again! I tried to ignore her to the best of my ability and shouted at Mike.

"Mike, hurry up! They're in danger!"

"I know, I'm hurrying!"

"Eit!"

Paul jumped into the lake. It seemed he was going to go save them in person. It was a good idea. I threw another Thunder Spear at the toothsaw, then jumped in after Paul.

"Die, die, die!"

Hwaya shot out white flames repeatedly. As an SS ranker, each of her attacks dealt critical blows to the toothsaw. Although some of them missed their mark, every time the attack hit the toothsaw, it writhed in pain and swung its saw violently. Seeing its blood spread through the lake water, I felt a sense of foreboding. Immediately afterward, Paul, who was on his way back with

people in his embrace, looked in the water and shouted.

“Damn it, T.K.! Toothsaws are flocking toward us!”

“I was just thinking that might happen. Hurry, Paul! Go up first and protect the others!”

With two foreign S rankers in his embrace, Paul jumped onto the ship. I also saved the two S rankers that came to help Britain and threw them onto the ship. Although Paul signaled me to come up, I shook my head.

“T.K., come up!”

“What about the others? If we leave them, they’ll die. If they’re going to be killed, I’ll be the one to do it, not some monsters like them.”

“But it’s dangerous down there!”

I ignored Paul and asked Peika.

“Peika, can you see the weakest person among the people floating there?”

[Yeah!]



“Can you make your lightning not work on that person only?”

[If it's just one person, I can do it!]

“Good, then we're going with max output now.”

[Okay!]

I took in a deep breath, and gave all my mana to Peika. I deactivated Spirit Aura without anyone noticing. Although it wasn't as strong as when Peika was materialized, Peika could still make full use of her power. Floating up in the air, Peika opened her folding fan. Her golden eyes flashed.

[Thunder Wave!]

In an instant, the surface of the lake was dyed golden.

[Kiaaaaaaak!]

The large toothsaw screamed, then became paralyzed. At the same time, the violent waves stopped. Using this opportunity, Hwaya raised her hands and shot out an especially large fireball, and the toothsaw exploded without leaving behind a trace. Although it had lost its two eyes, it still should have had ample health. Even so, Hwaya's fireball had obliterated it so cleanly. It was slightly terrifying. Her firepower was indeed excellent, but her flaw was that it took a while for her to gather it...

Then, two of the three people left floating on the lake, Brightman and Tommy, trembled. I believe you guys can endure it! Though, I'd be fine even if they didn't!

Finally, the toothsaws that were flocking from the smell of blood fainted from Peika's strengthened Thunder Wave and floated up to the surface. Just from a glance, there seemed to be more than two hundred of them. The people on the boat made awestruck exclamations.

“No way...”

“Thunder Knight, amazing...!”

I quickly swam. Although it would have been good if all the toothsaws were dead, my elemental magic wasn't that strong yet. If I couldn't save Brightman and the others while the toothsaws were unconscious, things would become more gory than what happened in the movie Jaws. I didn't want to see such a horror film, nor did I want to experience it. Most importantly, if they died, Britain would be troubled.

I first grabbed Tommy and the A+ rank healer, and threw them onto the ship. Then, I heard the voice again.

[Kyaaaaak! It hurts, you're so mean! All I did was sing, and you bully me like this!]

She was hurt by Thunder Wave, too! So she was hiding inside the lake. She was the reason I was in this mess, so what was she going on about? When I looked around the lake in the middle of rescuing Brightman, her voice rang out again.

[I'm going back. Hero is a meanie! Other kids are going to come kill you. Beh!]

“Other kids... will come kill me...?”

I instinctively retorted, as a word I couldn't ignore was mixed in her statement.

[That's right! Because we've been told to kill the Hero!]

I didn't know where or how she was talking to me, but her voice reached my ears clearly. In any case, she was told to kill me? By whom? Why? Plus, how did she know I was the Hero? Just what is a Hero anyways? Hearing the word I hadn't expected to hear, I froze for a moment.

[I felt bad because you were getting bullied, so I was going to play with you, but you electrocuted me! Beh, beh! I don't care if you die now!]

“W-Wait, talk to me! Where are you!?”

[I'm not coming out! If you're going to apologize, you better bring me some apple pie!]

With that, I no longer heard her voice. Damn it, don't just disappear after saying that!

“Where am I even going to get an apple pie...?”

I was dumbfounded. She didn't even reveal herself, and disappeared after saying what she had to say. However, my party members on the ship were staring at me like I was acting strange.

“T.K., what are you talking about? Apple pie?”

“Are you okay?”

“... You guys, did you not hear what the owner of the singing voice said?”

“Hm? We didn't hear anything other than the 'lala's.”

“...”

Then she only transmitted her voice to me? There was just too much to wrap my head around. Before my brain overloaded, I hit my head. Right now, I had to use my body, not my head. I had to save Brightman, even though I didn't want to even touch or see him. Before he became a corpse in Graveyard Over the Lake.

“I'm sorry that you have to do this.”

“You should be.”

Couldn't those magicians levitate other people with their magic? Even as I bluntly answered Hwaya, I swam toward Brightman. Then, I held him in my hands.

It was then that he opened his eyes.

Then, he punched my face.

“Kuk!”

As I did not expect him to open his eyes, much less punch me in the face, I did not resist his punch in the slightest. Plus, it hurt. Although I was used to pain from all those years I spent as a dungeon explorer, the pain I felt now ranked among the highest. Just from a single punch, my body rose up from the water and flew dozens of meters back.

“Kyaaaak! Brightman, what are you doing!?”

“No, damn it! T.K.!”

Hwaya was shocked and Mike cursed. Hm? Why Mike? In the middle of flying, I turned my head. As it had been a while since I experienced being unable to control my body, I actually enjoyed the refreshing feeling. Brightman, I won't kill you gracefully, you

son of a bitch.

When I turned my head thinking such idle thoughts, I surprisingly saw a melting tuna. It was an extremely large melting tuna. It was even bigger than the giant tooth saw from before. Not to mention, this one's body was entirely red. It seemed at least three times as strong and fast as the giant tooth saw. Continuing to hide my strength seemed dangerous. The moment I tried to summon Ruyue...

The melting tuna opened its mouth.

Without a chance to do anything, the melting tuna swallowed me whole.

# Chapter 100. Granting Freedom (7)

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The first thing I thought was, ‘wow, I’ve eaten tuna before, but this is the first time I was eaten by one.’

“Wait, now isn’t the time to be making stupid jokes...!”

It was slimy, claustrophobic, and irritating. The pressure of the tuna’s insides was no joke. What was this? Were my clothes melting? Acid!

“God!”

The melting tuna seemed to have dived back under the water after swallowing me, as water began to flow around me. Although things were chaotic, I first grabbed the top and bottom of the slimy walls. However, because it was so slippery, I failed to hold on. As if to quickly send me to its stomach, the surrounding walls wriggled and convulsed around me.

“Ruyue!”

[Got it!]

My elementals loved me so much that they came out the moment I called their names. I was thankful, but it was slightly overwhelming. Ruyue was especially so.

“Surround me with an Ice Wall! Make it especially hard!”

[Okay!]

The moment Ruyue started using Ice Wall, I activated my bracelet and equipped my armor. After wearing the armor, I realized I was almost out of mana. As I struggled to keep my balance, I took out a Mana Potion from my inventory and drank it. This place sucked!

In any case, I now had some breathing room. Although Ruyue’s Ice Wall began to melt the moment it was created, the space around me was getting bigger. However, the melting tuna’s body suddenly twitched violently. It was to be expected. If someone tried to open up its throat, it was bound to be irritated!

A flood of water suddenly swept over from one side. It seemed the melting tuna had opened its mouth and was letting water pour inside. It thought I was stuck in its throat, so it was trying to flush me down with water! It was pretty smart, though I might drown because of it.

I considered using Return and going back to Korea, but I decided to endure. There was a reason I couldn’t give up here.

“Ruyue, you can block it, right?”

[It’s hard. Shin, I don’t have much mana.]



Damn, even though I drank the most expensive Mana Potion, I was still running low? In that case, I'd have to ask Peika... Huh?

“... Peika, Peika?”

[Master, are you okay!?]

[Peika's outside. It's just the two of us in here.]

“Oh...’

Right, I deactivated Spirit Aura! The melting tuna had swallowed me, almost as if it knew. I quickly unsummoned Peika and resummoned her. Watching the vast amount of water pouring in with despair, I took out the Crimson Gluttony Spear. Ruyue's Ice Wall was making cracking noises and starting to crumble. Please hold out a little longer!

“Peika, come inside my spear.”

[Okay, Master!]

The spear that originally carried fire energy began to flicker with lightning as well. Although I wanted to continue watching the mystical and fascinating sight, I didn't have the time. The water was flowing in!

“Huu... Haaap!”

[Kuoooooooo!]

I strongly pierced the floor with my spear. Ignoring the melting tuna's painful cry, I dug the spear in deeper. Then, with one hand, I pushed the ceiling up, and with the other hand, I made the spear stand vertically. Letting go of the hand holding the ceiling up, I let the ceiling crush down on the top of the spear.

[Kiaaaaaak!]

The melting tuna let out another bloodcurdling scream as its blood splashed on my armor. Although the heat from my armor evaporated the blood almost instantly, the problem was that the melting tuna's movements had become more violent. Almost as if it was salsa dancing in the water, the ceiling flipped a few times and trembled. I held on to the spear I had wedged in its throat and hung on desperately.

[Shin, I can't hold on anymore!]

"It's fine, Ruyue! You can go back now, I'll call you back later."

[You have to love me lots later!]

"Yeah."

During the daytime, I'd only been calling Peika, so it seemed

Ruyue was feeling left out. Seeing the usually obedient Ruyue speak out before she left, I couldn't help but smile. No, now was not the time for that!

“Huu... Dark Thunder Explosion!”

Although it was a very filial skill that had saved me on multiple occasions, I cringed and flushed from embarrassment whenever I used it. Regardless, the violent shaking stopped from Dark Thunder Explosion's initial paralysis shock. When the following black lightning attack started, I closed my eyes and focused on holding onto my spear tightly. I knew its body would jolt violently.

[Kuaaaaaa!]

It let out a horrifying scream, almost like a human's, as it shook in a frenzy. The ceiling flipped again and again. The water finally swept over me, but I closed my mouth and held on.

[Shin, Shin! Are you alive? Are you okay? Oh, please!]

Sorry, I'm underwater, so I can't reply! However, Hwaya seemed to have misunderstood my silence as she raised her voice.

[Shin! Please, Shin! You said you had a way to survive any situation! I won't forgive you if you die like this!]

Dark Thunder Explosion ended. Although I wished it would have killed the melting tuna, it seemed a boss wasn't so easily killed. Its

insides were burnt black, but it was still moving. Huu, how uselessly tough! If it was just one month ago, I would have had no choice but to use Deific Manifestation to let Peruta save me with what little mana I had left, or use Return to go back to Korea.

However, right now, I still had another skill I could use. In fact, Dark Thunder Explosion had only been to see if this skill would be effective. It was the skill that came with my beloved armor, Crimson Roar! Although it would be annoying to roar underwater, now wasn't the time to be complaining.

“Uwaaaaak!”

[You used Crimson Roar. Everything blazes as flames.]

Roaring while swallowing a mouthful of water, I suddenly thought, ‘what was the description of Crimson Roar again? Didn't it turn all air that my voice could reach into flames? Since I'm underwater, isn't there little to no air!? Did I have to use Return and go back after all?’ Although I was worrying greatly...

[Kuaaaaa!]

My worry was soon proven to be unfounded. Everything within the reach of my voice, including water, turned into scarlet flames and blazed. There was one problem. Because the air I needed to breathe also turned into flames, I could not breathe. Even so, the flames blazed imposingly and with grandeur as if to burn away the

entire lake.

[Kuoooo—!]

An earth-shaking scream struck my ear. I instinctively knew that it was the melting tuna's death throes. Its shaking was getting less violent, and the pressure from its flesh was decreasing as well.

I took my spear out. Scratching the burning walls, I walked forward. Suddenly, I felt as if my body was rising. No, it was the melting tuna's body that was rising to the surface.

It had finally died.

[You swept the Field Dungeon, 'Graveyard Over the Lake!' You defeated over 80% of its monsters, two of the Field Dungeon bosses, and forced one Field Dungeon boss to retreat. The reward will be distributed.]

[Hwaya Eleni Mastiford-nim's contribution is the highest.]

[You successfully swept 'Graveyard Over the Lake.' For the next six months, a new boss monster will not appear on Graveyard Over the Lake. The reproduction rate of normal monsters will decrease significantly during this period.]

“Tsk.”

As I thought, I wasn't able to overtake Hwaya in contribution just by killing this guy. After all, she had been hunting monsters here for weeks longer than I had. Even so, I had killed this tuna by myself and I had even chased away that singing woman. Perhaps melting tuna was a weaker boss than the toothsaw. That had to be it.

[Shin, Shin! You're not dead!]

"Of course, not. Did you ever see a chef getting eaten by his ingredients?"

[Thank god, Shin! You don't know how scared I was thinking you were dead. Because of it, I realized that more than I thought before, I... Ah!]

"Hm?"

[Huu... Nothing, forget it. I got too excited from the sudden change in the situation.]

"Alright, well, I'll be out in a moment so hurry up and choose your reward. I want to pick mine too."

[... Heh, yeah. This much doesn't even count as danger to you, right?]

“Of course not. If I died like this, my father would start another season of thrashing phase.”

I answered Hwaya casually, unequipping my armor and putting my spear back into my inventory. While I was crawling out of its throat, the reward window popped up in front of me. Since Hwaya and I were the only dungeon explorers here, I was the only one left to choose a reward after Hwaya chose hers.

## [2. Great Tooth Sword]

“Wow... This looks completely useless...!”

I chose the reward with a frown and checked the item description. It was a sword breaker with a spiky saw-like blade, just like the toothsaws' saw-blade snout. It was even larger than most large swords, and had a strong vibration functionality in its options. If the vibration could be controlled, it could be a powerful weapon. It would have been nice if I was a sword-wielding warrior, but... Yep, it seemed I would have to feed it to my Gluttony Spear. Although I was looking forward to how much the Gluttony Spear would grow, I also knew it probably wouldn't grow by much.

For now, I put the Great Tooth Sword in my inventory. Then, the smell of fresh air tickled my nose. The outside was right in front of my nose!

I pushed the melting tuna's huge mouth open, and peeked my

head out. Hwaya and everyone else had driven the ship towards the tuna when it had floated up to the surface.

The first person I looked for was none other than Brightman. From the look on his face, he seemed surprised that I was still alive. I simply looked at him and smiled. As he didn't expect me to smile, that shameless Brightman frowned like he couldn't believe it. Then, he smirked. I wondered what his smirk meant. Was he looking down on me? I could feel how nonchalant he was, as if to say that I could not stand up to him in any way. Whether that was true or not, it didn't matter. What mattered was how I now understood him.

Although it was a bit embarrassing to say it myself, I had a tendency to be soft toward people I considered my allies. My family was obviously included, and I also cared deeply for those I considered my friends.

I couldn't come to dislike those that considered me their friend. Palludia was like that. Even though our first meeting on the 5th floor couldn't have been worse, while I was still grinding on the 5th floor, she had contacted me to cheer me up, changing the impression I had of her from 'strange girl' to 'friend.' Ye-Eun was also like that. Even though she was a nuisance when I first met her, she continually showed her interest towards me and repeatedly wanted to become friends with me.

Perhaps for the same reason, those that I considered to be my enemies took on my full hostility. Walker was the biggest example, as he sneaked into Hwaya's lodging and was almost beaten to death by me. Although Walker was now on my side, it seemed there was



a new enemy to replace him.

Brightman. He had to be laughing right now. Why did he hit me? Did Peika's lightning wake him up? Was he surprised because he saw me the moment he opened his eyes? Did he not like that Hwaya was so close to me? Was he awake the whole time, but pretended to be unconscious just to put me into danger? Was it revenge for losing his subordinate?

I didn't care. I wouldn't listen to his excuses later anyways. There was one thing I was sure of. It was that Brightman's punch was extremely painful, and that I had almost become a fish food because of him. That was enough.

You are my enemy. I'll make you bitterly regret this moment one day. Look forward to it. It won't take long. In the heights I wish to achieve, you are only a stone in the path.

I took my eyes off of Brightman and took my body out entirely. Then, I jumped on the melting tuna's head with a thud. Everyone seemed to have gotten back their sense of reality from the sound. Mike shouted.

“My god, T.K.! You were alive!”

“Huu... Mike, there's no way I would die without eating this melting tuna.”

“You really love melting tunas...”

“Of course. From now on, in honor of me killing this giant melting tuna, you can call me ‘Tuna King.’”

But really, if you actually call me that, I’ll hate you!

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Author’s Note:

Just like that, the Tuna King was born. (just kidding)